THE AFRICAN GOTHIC**:**

A STUDY OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN AFRICAN MYTHOS AND GOTHIC LITERATURE

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This study researched the steady influx of literary motifs of the African Diaspora that has influenced the changing narrative of the American Gothic genre. I examine the relationship between African themes and the subject of otherness that prevails in Gothic texts. In this inquiry, I propose that many of the contextual American Gothic themes have a rich and darker undertone attributed by the presence of the African, both in storytelling and historical elements. The purpose of this study is to suggest that the symbiotic nature of historical events and older forms of storytelling practices have created a unique fusion in the literary canon which has become the American Gothic genre.

This study is motivated by two research questions: (1) How are the monsters/creatures of Gothic texts transformed by the introduction of race? (2) What role did the Transatlantic Slave Trade play in appropriating different cultural stories? This thesis proposes that various oral storytelling practices of the African continent are the

rudimentary basis for many of the American Gothic tales. It is proposed that when members of tribes migrated they brought the stories with them and passed down the implicational basis to their children with only locale, language, and cultural evolutionary structures changing.

Earlier research into American Gothic literature discounted contributions of African Diasporic cultures and focused solely on European archetypes. This study is a brief survey of the American Gothic genre with an in-depth assessment of the African geneses in newer texts. I have determined that a shared historical link between African Diasporic storytelling/culture within the texts of Toni Morrison, Jean Rhys, Octavia Butler, and Maryse Condé is symbiotic with the texts of J.S. Le Fanu, Charlotte Brontë, and Anne Rice thus opens up the possibility for further research into the adaptation of human storytelling practices within the American Gothic genre.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Dastardly deeds done under the cover of night, the megalomaniacal villain cackling from atop a crumbling tower as lightning paints the sky, or Frankenstein's creature shattering his chains as he flees a torch wielding mob; the desiccated corpse pulling itself from a freshly turned grave in search of living flesh, or a young woman caught in the throes of terror caused by a ghostly possession, these are the more common images that come to mind when discussing the Gothic. The fantastical and often cruel nature of humans exposed under the critical eye of readers. As a genre, what is the Gothic? Is it a relic from the past, or a discussion on society forever frozen in the moment? Most casual readers might say that they are stories meant to scare the hapless and young. The more involved reader may suggest that they are tales of true horror based in the past or present, with foreshadowing of the future. An imaginative reader could search through twisting plot lines to reveal a family riffed with dark and twisted secrets. The genre is peppered with vampires, werewolves, faeries, and ghosts; the deformed or uncouth, a savage beast literally hiding in human form, or a monster made from the dead.

Gothic literature has been considered a solely European literary invention with every sequential branch in the genre evolving after exposure to different cultures. There is evidence that African mythos, culture, and spirituality permeates the myriad ways of

storytelling; this thesis proposes that an acknowledgement of historical African ancestral wisdom correlates with the evolution of Gothic literature, in particularly the American branch. Where some scholars have made mention that the basis for certain characters in Gothic literature are designed from mythologies taken from local sources, they neglect informing their readers of the very real influence of African subtleties and ancestral wisdom that saturates the very roots of the literary genre.

This thesis is a study of the foundational patterns that can be readily ascertained from tradition styles of African literary devices specifically those used in the Gothic canon of the Americas. The African conceptualizations of memory, balance, gender roles, and sexuality are explored in the context of belief in the supernatural, community groups, importance of location, and the practice of ritualized storytelling. The question that stands out is: would American Gothic literature have developed as a meaningful genre without the influence of African storytelling practices, experiences, or language? This study will examine the implications of the African Diaspora's literary significance as epistemological evidence within Gothic literature. It will also look into texts by Charlotte Brontë, Octavia Butler, Maryse Condé, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Toni Morrison, Jean Rhys, and Anne Rice for comparisons between European and American Gothic narratives.

Leading Comparative Literature and African Diaspora Literary scholars such as Jack Goody, Wole Soyinka, Alexis Brooks de Vita, Henry Louis Gates, Jr, Teresa Washington, Toni Morrison, Robert Farris Thompson, and Tabish Khair have discussed the myriad ways that African cultures have contributed to Western Literature and academics. Their works have furthered interest in both Gothic and African literary texts

through conscientious research and thought provoking insights. African Diaspora literature is not studied as an adjacent field but as a comprehensive and integral part of human cultural development. These scholars posit that enslaved Africans brought their various cultures through the Atlantic Slave Trade and permeated the new areas with a distinctive mixture of ancestral wisdom and daily life experiences to form the literature of the Americas.

Where some reader and academicians would base all American literature on Eurocentric narratives this is not only a falsehood, but negates the very real influx of cultural identity found in narratives like Gothic, National, and Fictional. The differences between Gothic and Fictional narratives can be discerned easily where one is used as a historical pinpoint and the other only briefly references history. The Gothic texts that are focused on in this thesis act as a form of ritualized storytelling that combines real life situations with mythos and theater. Jack Goody states that "Myth does a number of different things. It has some narrative element. But the importance of that has been greatly exaggerated by the collectors of myths (and mythologies) who have often deliberately asked their respondents for stories and not cared much about the philosophical, theological, wisdom aspects of the recitation" (128). By using authors who are from mixed ethnic cultures to compare the literature, the reader joins the various sides of communal storytelling that the enslaved Africans brought with them from Continental Africa.

Nigerian scholar and Comparative Literature professor, Dr. Wole Soyinka, expresses the paradigm of the meaning of humanity: "There, illusively, hovers the key to the human paradox, to man's experience of being and non-being, his dubiousness as

essence and matter, intimations of transience and eternity, and the harrowing drives between uniqueness and Oneness" (140). This humanistic trait is seen in Gothic literature where characters struggle to find balance in their own lives. Gothic, especially American Gothic literature urges readers to transcend concepts of race, culture, gender, and language in pursuit of understanding the perspective of another person. The tendency of readers to place the gothic in a European cast ignores the amenable relationship that it shares with animistic cultures and beliefs. As a genre, the gothic explores individuals, their reasoning, their expression of fears, and their place in the communal setting.

This thesis proposes that the historical symbiosis of more ancient African concepts and modern texts in Gothic literature is deeper than previously researched. Dr. Alexis Brooks de Vita's work in Africana Women's literature connects both the Diaspora and Continental Africa's style of inherent wisdom despite the physical and cultural separation between the groups. She states that "The consistent quality of metaphorical presence and their choice of unique mythatypical tools isolates, defines, and distinguishes Diaspora and Continental Africa women's literature" (Brooks de Vita 5). Mythatypes, according to Brooks de Vita, are the grand design of archetypes that fit into mythologies and form the core knowledge that characters of fiction are based upon. Dr. Teresa Washington also posits that the presence of the orishas Aje and Yemoja are precursors to gothic characters, particularly heroines of the horror and romantic subgenres. Washington attributes the worldwide Diasporic acknowledgment of Yemoja to the Middle Passage. She argues that the Ethiopian Ocean, what is now called the Atlantic Ocean, was instrumental in the spreading of knowledge of the Yoruba peoples. "Yemoja

attained global recognition in the modern era because of the greatest atrocity in human history: the exile and trafficking of Africans through Yemoja's own womb, the Ethiopian Ocean" (Washington 217).

It is the author's hope that a concrete foundation for further study can be pursued that links the wide wealth of African motifs and themes to Gothic literature and that the worth of Diasporic literary material can be assessed at higher levels of historical and academic perusal. The few texts that are explored in this thesis are a microcosm of the whole, but have vast social context and insight into history. They present an unvarnished true picture of the Enslavement Era as well as the hypocrisy of the Enlightenment, delving into mindsets that justified slavery, brutality, and extermination. Aimé Cesairé postulates that:

> A civilization that proves incapable of solving the problems it creates is a decadent civilization. A civilization that chooses to close its eyes to its most crucial problems is a stricken civilization. A civilization that uses its principles for trickery and deceit is a dying civilization" (31)

Gothic literature rips the blinders off of the idyllic fabrications of the "civilized" 18th and 19th-centuries. American Gothic literature goes further by exposing the implicit racial biases of that time period.

The individuals that may find the information within the spaces beneficial are Masters students and researchers of American Gothic literature, African diaspora literature, American literature, Women studies, LGBTQIA+ literary studies, and esoteric studies. There is a correlation between most of the subject matter and fields of study that dissolves the claim that there is any discernible separation in the genre of Gothic

literature. These fields are valid for not only American Gothic literature or historical textbooks for world literature. The research in this thesis is a blueprint set to explore texts that lead to a broader world of creative and historical text. It references not only history and culture, but spiritual belief that had to be hidden among the dominant cultural norms of eurocentrism.

From a young age there was a fascination with horror and fantasy stories. To become immersed in the waves of dark imagery that crashed against the shores of a fertile imagination was at both terrifying and invigorating. Terrifying because even as fiction, the situations portrayed felt real; invigorating because a young reader got the chance to see a hero triumph over perceived evil. These innocent feelings were the beginning of a creative writing outlet that has lasted to the present. As time has passed, and the age of reasoning approached, there has been subtle recognition between the contents of literature of the African Diasporic and favored childhood stories. *Anansi the Spider: A Tale from the Ashanti* and *Aesop's Fables* decorated either bookshelf or bed as night fell. Finding the places where the texts intersects became a personal challenge, one that has fueled the contents of this thesis and the years of research behind it.

Elders within the African Diasporic community have told stories through the ages to keep a sense of kinship and cultural appreciation alive in their families. Parents and grandparents remembering historical events or cultural narratives that needed to be preserved turned them into tales such as *Brer Rabbit and the Tar Baby*. These tales are history, full of precious memories for those who have no name or face to be remembered. They are voices in the void that are being sung into the ears of children and promises that are being kept. These stories have waited to be shared, told in their unadorned glory and

rich medley of color and syntax. They are part and parcel of what it means to be African living within and outside of the Continent.

As a reader, there is much of history that is shrouded behind veiled words and twisted phrases. By looking at American Gothic literature and the influences of the African Diaspora, a reader can get the sense of how much history has been concealed as well as how much has been deliberately reduced in terms of significance. There is a love of historical retellings that is deep and consuming; this love makes for a dedicated teacher who wants to impart certain knowledge upon his or her students. To be able to find out the truth of the past is one of the most fulfilling and rewarding things that a researcher can have. It is an achievement to be able to teach the new generations how to research and look for the fact buried beneath falsehoods.

Common human threads to storytelling are made available when researching through Gothic literature, especially the American Gothic. This allows for readers to be able to understand where their ancestors may have traveled, migratory patterns and how their survival was a necessity. It is a fact that human beings tell stories to connect past to present, to teach future generations, to enlighten about the politics of the present, and to give a sense of belonging through communities that may have been severed in the past. This is the importance of the Africana story and its place in the literary cannon of the Americas. These are historical timestamps, or place markers, for new researchers to find and navigate amongst literature that maybe be divisive or hold discrepancies based on communal belief about the nature of Africans in the Americas.

Research methods used in the rendering of this thesis were a combination of Qualitative, Correlational, and Meta-analysis. The qualitative research methods used

involved surveys and intensive readings together with the express correlational opinions, motivations, and overt reasoning of the authors who presented their work. It is hoped that these texts will provide insight into authors work and develop the hypothesis that could be used in correlating data between European and African diaspora literatures. The works of Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, Anne Rice, Toni Morrison, Maryse Conde, Charlotte Brontë, Jean Rhys, and Octavia Butler all correlate within the hypothesis that African influences have been present since the beginning of American literature, whether it is in the Caribbean or the American continent—North and South—or if it has been presented through The Transatlantic Slave Trade. By cross-referencing the data analyzed and applying several literary theories, it was concluded that the works initial value as thesis material was of great importance.

The main contribution of "Chapter One: Introduction" is to lay the foundational groundwork for the thesis and to introduce the area of research, relevant previous findings, worthwhileness of study, and areas for possible advancement in the field of American Gothic literature, specifically African Gothic tropes and motifs. Target groups for potential research are included along with reasons why they might like the information presented. Included are the author's personal motivations in choosing the topics offered in this thesis, as well as the research methodologies used to collect the data being employed. The basic structural layout of the chapters is shown and how the works collate.

In Chapter Two, "Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*: The Gothic Africanization of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*," the author presents a comparison between *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë and *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys. Discussed in this chapter is the

very real presence of European centralized thinking versus the viewpoints of an Africanized culture. The chapter focuses on Rochester's wife, the life that she lived, and the haunting accords of her death within a Gothic trope. The events of *Jane Eyre* are played out with a different leading character, one who is stranger to both European ways and the lack of freedom in choice. There is a brief exploration on religious and spiritual practices from the African cultures of the Caribbean that conflicts with European Christian values and how the enslaved population maintained cultural heritage.

In Chapter Three, "From Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to Octavia Butler's *Fledgling*: Female Vampires as Metaphors for Race, Power, Miscegenation, and Sexuality," the reader is introduced to two female vampires who appear to be underage, yet possess all of the stereotypical traits of the monster they are envisioned as being. Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* introduces the concept of a vampire that has melanin to avoid the dangers of direct sunlight and the diehard members of her species who want to eradicate her. Sexuality as an overt and healthy feminist trait is discussed with the apparent youthfulness of both vampiric women making for uncomfortable discourse. Both characters face a male-dominated, European narrative where they either survive or perish because of their situations.

In Chapter Four, "Slave Narratives by Any Other Name: The Gothic Specters in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour*" there is a comparative analysis between a Caribbean author's work, an African-American author's work, and an immersed European-American author's work. *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* is explored as a slave narrative through the beginnings of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, *Beloved* as the dire effects that

permeate African-American culture as a direct result of slavery, and *The Witching Hour* as a comprehensive guide to the mindset of European thinking in regards to chattel slavery. Each of the three works are disseminated and tagged as slave narratives because of their shared themes and the influence of the African cultures within their societal groups. The three authors are presented as guiding voices within the slave narrative historical novel, whether through fictional or traditional accounts.

Finally, in Chapter Five, "Conclusion," a summary of the problem will be discussed with the main findings outlined for reader and researcher's consumption. The implicational bias of the Gothic texts are appraised and correlated into a working outline for further study. Suggestions about the direction of future findings will be presented and conclusive thoughts determined. It is hoped that this chapter will act as a transitive narration in the field of Comparative literature and American Gothic literature with a focus on the elements in African Diaspora literary texts.

CHAPTER 2

Jean Rhys's Wide Sargasso Sea:
The Gothic Africanization of Charlotte Brontë's Jane Eyre

The Gothic novel is a vehicle for articulating the anxieties of a marginalized group within a larger community. European colonials brought their contexts and societal appreciations to the New World but did not understand, or care about the ramifications of imposing those rules unto the enslaved Africans subjugated by their whims. African peoples had an expressed and unique way of envisioning the world at large where everything fell within concepts that the Europeans did not understand or appreciate. Most Europeans colonials treated the African individuals under their control as if they were simple-minded children and did not see the wider scope of their cultural identities. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* is guilty of this cultural blindness; though not malicious the novel is absent in realization of the individual needs of a subjugated people outside of a European mien.

Spirituality, language, gender roles, and social status fell into the myriad ways that African people and their descendants approached the material world, some with complex intricacies still baffle researchers to the present. These intricate and insightful ways were treated with a casual disdain that is thinly hidden in most Gothic texts in regards to the subject of race and otherness. An outsider's perspective of the European branch of Gothic literature can open an avenue into a definitive expression of post-

colonial thought. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys is a Gothic novel made possible by the influence of African cultural subtext into a traditional European medium; the main story is a prequel to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* while the subplot questions the validity of a solely European oration in a racially diverse setting. *Wide Sargasso Sea* takes the time to explore African contributions in a colonial environment, specifically through the eyes of the lead female character, Antoinette Cosway.

Wide Sargasso Sea is Jean Rhys's attempt to rectify some of the more blatant European disregard with an insider's understanding of a world view that Brontë would not have had any explicit knowledge of beforehand. Rhys presents Rochester as a foreigner in a new setting completely outside of his normal perception of reality and tells the story of his estranged wife, Bertha Antoinette Cosway Mason, from her perspective initially. By doing so, she opens up a discourse into the living conditions of the European and African in colonial Jamaica right after the abolishment of slavery. *Wide Sargasso Sea* studies the nuance of cultural practices of the African and how this influenced the storytelling of Gothic literature with inclusionary critiques. Author Toni Morrison postulated in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* that, "Living in a nation of people who decided that their world view would combine agendas for individual freedom and mechanisms for devastating racial oppression presents a singular landscape for a writer" (xiii); it is easy to envision this sentiment in application to Rhys's own writing style.

Jean Rhys was the daughter of a "white" Creole, a term used to distinguish the children of ethnical and cultural miscegenation from the so-called "pure" ones, who faced racial prejudice from both the Africans and English who had taken over Jamaica. There is

an implication in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea* that a certain level of monitoring was condoned in regards to those individuals that were considered mixed race. Justine Edwards stated that the "policing of miscegenation arose from a terror of hybridity" (7), as if the children were monstrous because of their heredity. These individuals did not wholly belong to one world or another, but were creatures of both and had a unique perspective that encompassed the African as well as the European. They could appreciate the culture that had formed between remnants of both groups within the new social strata and saw value in it. Rumors about Rhys's mother, as with Antoinette's own, are spoken of as scandalous and seen as aberrant to the polite society of the time.

Many of the Europeans that resided in Jamaica post-slavery were of English descent and viewed England through a rosy haze; even their children whom had never set foot on the island-nation saw England as "home." Unlike the Europeans, Rhys's mother, and consequentially Rhys, viewed Jamaica as home, not Britain. Kenneth Ramchand noted that "Jean Rhys, daughter of a Welsh doctor and White West Indian mother, spent her childhood in Dominica before going to England at the age of sixteen. Memories from a West Indian childhood float about in her earliest writing" (181). Both women occupied the space of being submersed in the culture of the island without regard for the European standards being imposed upon them. The similarities of circumstances with the characters in *Wide Sargasso Sea* would have possibly made them outcasts in certain social circles and may have influenced Rhys in the creation of Antoinette and her mother, Annette. Jean Rhys's novel approaches the situation with a determinate air, searching through the Gothic menace implied in Charlotte Brontë's view of the colonies and their inhabitants. The author makes Jane's bias in text as indicative of the collective consciousness of

British rationality towards situations and people who were different, a common trope that defines otherness in Gothic literature.

Victoria Burrows implies that the, "psychohistorical dislocation that accompanied the dismantling in the mid-1800s of the British Empire in the Caribbean resulted in a form of collective stasis among the white creole population who believed they had been deserted by the imperial motherland" (26). This stasis is seen in the way that Antoinette's mother drifts inwardly to escape the realistic dangers of life in Jamaica after their home is destroyed and Antoinette's younger brother is killed in the fire. She hides from the circumstances and consequentially abandons her daughter in her time of need. Young Antoinette's life is placed into turmoil when the only home that she knows is destroyed, her sibling is killed, the people who were considered friends turned on her family, and her mother has a break from reality, a situation that is mirrored in a later portion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre*. Annette Cosway Mason is representative of a failed system in the post-slavery West Indies, she is frozen in time mentally, driven insane by not being able to move forward because she clings tightly to the past. She is cut away from the moorings of her life and this allows for abuses to her and her only living child. Rhys seems to use Annette Cosway as the starting conversation on privilege versus reality, she foreshadows events that are played out fully in *Jane Eyre*.

Gothic novels have a tendency to fall into categories based upon the themes that their authors chose to embrace. Themes and tropes in Gothic literature that are common include: fear of differences, aversion of female sexuality, stigmatizing of religion/culture, and the presence of the supernatural. Though more commonly discussed in European Gothic literature, African cultural references have impacted the dialogue by presenting a

differing world view. The European themes have a tendency of putting the Gothic into either horrific or romantic contexts where the specter of betrayal underlies each action made in reference to the main characters. On the surface, Gothic novels are full of haunting ghost stories, tales of monsters and murder, or mayhem created by situations mirrored in the real world. Behind that looking glass of fantastical elements are deeper contexts such as: revolution, classism, racism, xenophobia, colonialism, and sexism. The characters within European gothic novels are doppelgängers—twins or mirror reflections—of real people placed in horrendous situations; yet, these characters are exclusively seen through a "white" lens and have to follow the rules of the society that they are placed within. The characters are up against outstanding odds which have been stacked against them and are required to surmount these challenges with varying degrees of success. Authors are tasked with being able to discuss the many ills of society, even if they hid this critique within a fantastical context.

Jane Eyre illustrates how classism, sexism, and xenophobia played a major role in dictating the lives of women in England. Jane is an orphan who resides in the home of her aunt on sufferance. She is treated as a burden and outcast in her familial group. She is sent away from the only home that she knows based upon her actions against her abusive relatives. While attending the Lowood School, she is a subject of fate and folly caused by the actions of the headmaster and governess. Rochester treats Jane as a third-class citizen until she captures his interest. Jane's worth is classified by her association with specific circles: her aunt's family, the members of Lowood School, Rochester's household, and St. John River's household. Her life is ruled by a combination of pragmatic thinking and

ingrained cultural fear that seems to cover for her sexuality and intelligence in a time when neither are appreciated.

Rhys had a unique position as author and descendant. She could understand both sides of the argument about enslaving people, but also understood the double edged sword of being other. She was quoted as saying that "I would feel sick with shame at some of the stories I heard of the slave days told casually even jocularly. The ferocious punishments the salt kept ready to rub into the wounds etc. etc. [sic]. I became an ardent socialist and champion of the down trodden, argued, insisted of giving my opinion, was generally insufferable. Yet all the time knowing that there was another side to it. Sometimes being proud of my great grandfather, the estate, the good old days etc….Perhaps he wasn't entirely ignoble" (qtd. in Burrows 33). She knew that her family had owned slaves, that her great-grandfather and grandfather had participated in horrific things to punish people, what she did not like was the very English sentiment that they were better than the "white" creoles. She points to this hypocrisy in *Wide Sargasso Sea* when Rochester sleeps with one of the formerly enslaved girls, Amelie, all the while his wife was in the room next door. Rhys made Antoinette respond to her husband by telling him that he was just the same as the planters whom he looked down upon. This statement by Rhys sought to strip away the established fiction that the British were of a different caliber than their Spaniard or French counterparts.

To understand the cultural disdain for those who made up the Creole group in Jamaica, there needs to be an exploration of how these traditions were established and their importance on the larger scale. The identity of a Creole person was more than blood related; it was an intrinsic part of him or herself from his or her religious practice to the

way that they danced. Many people are quick to put the Creole identity as being a hybrid of the old cultures without looking at how that hybridity actually formed something new. Matthew Robertson, for example, notes that "Although made up of a blend of cultures and traditions, a Creole identity must be seen as something completely different from the cultures it arose out of" (29). This gives the reader an opportunity to look at the contexts of *Wide Sargasso Sea* from an internal lens. Antoinette is a product of her environment, a child of mixed heritage and has been thoroughly cognitive of this. Her new husband tries to force her into the mold he deems as being socially acceptable without taking into any consideration who and what she is. This causes conflict from the very beginning and extrapolates on how her obvious race, her cultural heritage, and her feminine identity come into play as a character.

Jean Rhys presents an idea of the origins of the "mad woman in the attic" trope as she examines the relationship between Antoinette and Rochester. While it may be argued that the traumatic events of Antoinette's youth and upbringing played a crucial role into her descent into madness, Rhys shows the reader that the emotional and mental abuse that is suffered during the telling of the events leading up to *Jane Eyre* are major contributing factors. Rhys addresses each possibility into Antoinette's downward spiral: the death of her younger brother, her home being destroyed, the mental and physical abandonment of her parents, the societal abuse she endures, the stripping away of family members based on the color of their skin, the social machinations of her engagement and marriage to Rochester, Rochester's infidelity, being torn away from the island of her birth, as well as being imprisoned in the attic as her mind breaks. She does not go with the status quo but asks why: why is this woman mad, why is she insane, and who made her that way? Rhys

uses cultural references from Afro-Caribbean communities to address her concerns about Antoinette. There is a distinction between being mad and insane that Rhys makes clear throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is mad at Rochester's dichotomous ability to cheat and look with disdain on the Creole planters who were on the island before the English. She was consequentially driven insane through the loss of control in her life.

African concepts and themes presented in Afro-Caribbean literature, such as *Wide Sargasso Sea*, discuss the justifications used to endure the "Enslavement Period" as it was deemed by those of Yoruba descent. Baba Ifa Karade states in *The Handbook of Yoruba Religious Concepts* that it "is no small wonder that Yoruba culture became the dominant theme of African-American transference" (4). Karade includes all members of the African Diaspora in the New World as African-American and thus descended from the Yoruba, the largest ethnicity of Africans that were taken from the continent. African descendants were transported to New World countries and islands with a distinct knowledge of their cultural heritage. Rituals for dancing, conduct, and vengeance were passed along through tales around fires. These rituals became the basis of Africanized storytelling in the New World and influenced many of its writers from the onset. It is important to remind the reader that not all of the enslaved were farmers or young children; there were significant portions of the 75 million people transferred through the Middle Passage who were warrior-priests and elite soldiers. This fact would account for the breaking period of the enslaved people to acclimate them to their new situation, but it in no way stripped them of their culture as was thoroughly wished for.

The easiest and most prolific way for the enslaved to pass on their cultural identity was through a type of ritualized storytelling, African oral traditions codified with

the new language that they were forced to learn. The ritual of gathering up members of the community and building a foundation for learning is part and parcel of the African Diaspora's way of sharing a wealth of information. Maisha L. Wester explores the power of African styles of storytelling and ritual in *African American Gothic*. She argues that "The unity of God and man also includes the unity of the dead/ancestral with the living, those who are obliged to remember them through story" (Wester 27). By remembering the dead as if they were living, the enslaved Africans were able to pass along ancestral cultural knowledge in a fictionalized way. This skill was easily hidden from the more superstitious Europeans who instantly dubbed it as "brutish" storytelling, when in actually it was veiled truths being passed on. This belief is at the heart of the cultural references that are seen in the *Kongo Cosmogram*, where everything fits into a pre-determined pattern, or life-cycle, and allows for the re-emergence of African lore in modern settings and mediums.

The *Kongo Cosomogram*, according to Robert Farris Thompson, is the fork in the middle of the road which can allude to crucially important symbols of passage and communication between the worlds. A simple cross that is contained within a circle to represent the world as a whole, the *Kongo Cosmogram* divides female/male, living/dead, physical/spiritual, and good/evil into understandable points of origin. Yoruban people use the *Kongo Cosmogram* in rituals of storytelling, music, and living wisdom. It is said that "The righteous Kongo person will never be destroyed but will come back in the name or body of progeny" (Thompson 109). The symbol is a part of Obeah, or Africanized Syncretic religions. The cycles of birth-death-reincarnation are spoken about the same way as Christ's resurrection, as a part of a grand plan, and used to symbolize the untold

amounts of Africans who died during the Middle Passage. This gave hope to their peoples that they would find a way to come back to the world which is also seen in the common phrase, “Old People’s Children.” Once thought to signify being raised by elder relatives in various African Diasporic communities, it has come to mean an old soul being reborn.

The *Kongo Cosmogram* becomes a physical manifestation of primal power, or *Ashe*, into righteous human development and is called *Aba*, used as a means to focus thought and action into survival. These actions became rebellions such as slave uprisings and the passing of knowledge between generations. Certain facets of *Aba* are seen in texts like *Wide Sargasso Sea* with Antoinette joining the dancing former slaves, or her belief in the spiritual practice of Obeah. Obeah, like Santería and Voodoo, is an African spiritual belief that encompasses the whole human experience and is a manifestation of ancient Yoruba rituals that have syncretized with Christianity through the entirety of slavery.

There is an intersection between African spirituality and religious expression that is seen in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, specifically in the culture of the island surrounding the former slaves and the Creole planters. Gothic literature has explored the contradictions that dictate abject belief in a supernatural world yet stigmatize differing representations based on varying cultural norms. The religion of Obeah is considered Jamaican in origination while Voodoo is Haitian and Santería is Afro-Latino yet they have similarities that are inherent in cultural subtext. Each of these hyper-indigenous religious beliefs is a fusion of the old African principles mixed with Christianity. Obeah has a strong presence in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, so much so, that the English colonials are seen to be afraid of it. Gothic literature has shown the dichotomy of English superstitious belief: ghosts, ghouls,

monsters, and Christian sentiment. They are proven to have an almost preternatural clinginess to stories and fabrications that terrify them, which is not unlike the African Diaspora's spiritual practices. This English dichotomy could be because of their lack of understanding of the actual religious subtext or that they viewed the Africans as devilish.

The stigma of Obeah follows Antoinette through the entirety of the novel and shapes her interactions with Rochester, the former slaves, and the Europeans still inhabiting Dominica; especially when it comes to her maiden name of Cosway. Names in Obeah have meaning and power, to change a person's name is to change their very being; this is shown with Rochester's willful way of changing Antoinette's name to Bertha. He disdains everything African, and thus foreign, yet he practices the same actualization that the other Europeans do with casual disregard and dismissal of something different than what he knows. "Rochester's determination to subjugate Antoinette is also evident in his persistence in calling her "Bertha" (her name from *Jane Eyre*). Few things are more closely linked to a person's sense of self than his or her name. Rochester's patriarchal onomastics – Antoinette calls it English obeah – is a strategy aimed at controlling her innermost being" (McKenzie 60). Onomastics in this case refers to the importance of proper names and thus their humanization of the characters. Rochester's deliberate changing of his wife's name is a sign of mental abuse; he is essentially telling Antoinette that her history before him does not matter, that she does not matter, and that she is only made important by his place for her.

In *Obeahwomen and Creolized Christianity*, Matthew Robertson offers a modern definition of what the particular religion contributes to the African population. "At the same time, the practice of obeah as a religious tradition has been used by the European

colonizers of the Caribbean as a means to separate themselves from the black population and place them into a space where they are identified as "other""(60). Obeah is a way of life for the African inhabitants of the island, yet it is the English who are more superstitious of it than the former slaves. A thought-provoking representation of the presence of Obeah and the psychological effect that it has on the Europeans can be viewed in their fear of it, rather than any possible revenge scenario that the former enslaved inhabitants may have upon them. The novel exposes the contradictory actions of a people who prized logic over belief; their fear is interspersed with a tangible level of spitefulness that illustrates the farce of superiority. This is a prime example of Gothic literature exposing religious and cultural supremacy complexes by introducing radical otherness, or abjection. The false narrative implied creates a myth that becomes stereotypical and incidental evidence for continuing oppressive behaviors. A main narrative in the story is how the English women expand rumors about the Cosways with a certainty that is rarely found outside of the established assemblage's fundamental practices.

During Part Two of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette takes over the narrative from Rochester and tells him that, "People talked about her, they would not leave her alone, they would be talking about her and stop if they saw me" (Rhys 80). She tries to get her husband to understand the true level of spite that has been directed towards her family, and in essence towards those "white" creoles still inhabiting the island. He is deliberately ignorant, suggesting that everything is in her mind rather than her seeing the plain truth of her situation. Rochester, as an outsider, cannot comprehend the trauma that being branded as "other" has on Antoinette, nor on her mother. He is resentful of having to

marry her, even though he says that he would give it an honest chance. Instead, he pushed Antoinette away without any real thought. She is property to him, like her dowry, and he does not recognize her humanity anymore. Antoinette's revenge on Rochester is manifold for she is not content with using her knowledge of Obeah against him. She also places a significant "curse" on her husband which is foreshadowed in his interactions with other women. She in essence damns herself because of her misuse of the spiritual practice. This is similar to many Gothic texts that allude to deals made with the devil/demon, or a malignant being. The devil in this case is the malicious influence of Antoinette's own fear and loathing.

There are the clearly recognized themes of the abandoned house, the ruins, the madwoman in the attic, as well as the sense of betrayal that is present in almost every Gothic novel. What *Wide Sargasso S*ea does is to make those elements so commonplace that the otherness described within the novel is seen as more interesting. The discourse on race, feminine sexuality, and religion become a main focal point that the reader is asked to navigate. Tabish Khair has argued that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a Gothic novel not just because it has all thematic concerns of a Gothic text, but because it also goes against the grain of the clearly established patterns. Khair states that, "*Wide Sargasso Sea* does not simply take on these elements from *Jane Eyre*: it establishes its own relationship to the Gothic, and hence to discourses of rationality and the supernatural" (114).

Another author, Kelly Josephs stated that "In insisting on "other sides" and third spaces, *Wide Sargasso Sea* complicates the fixity and dualism— black/white, European/native, mad/sane— that those in power are invested in maintaining, especially during periods of social upheaval, such as during abolition (the setting of the novel) and

decolonization (the period of its creation and publication)" (71). *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a deviation from the normal European binaries in Gothic texts as it layers the visible contexts of xenophobia and racial superiority with the underpinnings of intrasocial behaviors between the African and Creole populations. The novel makes an intriguing connection between the autonomy of the world that the characters inhabit both in *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Jane Eyre* and expanding the metaphorical elements used to make readers ask why such Gothic tropes work. Rhys's use of changing the focus of the main character opens up a rich canvas of psychoanalytical study. She redefines the idea of Antoinette as a "madwoman" along the lines of racial and cultural identity instead of as being mentally incompetent or fragile.

Rhys also sets up the divides within Jamaica as a starting point for expansion on this theme. She looked at the various ways that Gothic otherness is presented in the text as well as in the society that is being perused. Robertson states that "By clearly dividing colonial society literally into black and white, between the "civilized" European and the "primitive" African slaves, the colonizers were able to marginalize and trivialize the black populations. The creation of the "other" was at this point complete, with the "otherness" referring to race, religion, and culture" (65). Where otherness used to symbolize those fantastical elements of European mythos, with imps and fairies or monsters, Rhys uses the African subtext to clear away the obscure and question the validity of non-inclusiveness. She adds the old African gods and spiritual practices, forms of worship, and ideas of personhood to show the similarities to the binary of right-wrong, that has been used before to invoke the imagination.

The non-inclusiveness brings the reader back to a prevailing theme in European Gothic novels, ones of possession and the undead. In African mythos, particularly Yoruba, the undead are all around the individual human, their presence is felt or discarded by that person's connection with them. European motifs that feature the undead give them a sinister quality; they are to be avoided at all costs. In *Jane Eyre*, Bertha/Antoinette is a ghostly figure haunting Rochester's estate. She is a specter to be locked away to assuage her husband's guilty consciousness. Victoria Nelson reasoned that *Wide Sargasso Sea* deviates from the Gothic pre-established themes while at the same time addressing them with an African element. Nelson focuses on the distinctly African mythos of the undead and how it changes perceptions by re-imagining the race of the new zombie-like being that is created; a concept that is seen in both Antoinette and her mother at varying places within the novel. She stated that by lifting "this creature out of regionalized Afro-Caribbean folklore into the Western Gothick imaginary by depicting people of European origin Changed into zombies" (Nelson 151) follows the old European trope of devilish possession. The emphasis placed on changed with a capital c is how Nelson correlates the zombie-like Europeans with the view of enslaved Africans as non-autonomous human works. Annette becomes a zombie when her life is taken away from her; while Antoinette, in comparison, is affected by similar betrayals after she finds out about her husband's infidelity. This perpetuation of male ignorance towards fidelity seems to have caused more damage to Antoinette's psyche than the abuses from her younger years.

The question of how *Wide Sargasso Sea* can be seen as a Gothic novel should be laid squarely upon the current analyses of *Jane Eyre* and why that novel works as a

Gothic text. Charlotte Brontë wrote *Jane Eyre* from the perspective of a young woman struggling to see the world for the first time. The text is decidedly feminist and plays with the concept of the Byronic Hero while making Jane question everything that she ever knew. Where the novel fails as a feminist text is that it looks at Antoinette's character as irrelevant. She is a blockade in Jane's path to happiness, not a real person or the indication of Rochester's core nature of selfishness. This could be because of the limited perspective of both the character and author. Even Jane's description of Antoinette does not envision her as human, but as something wild and untamed. "What it was, whether beast or human being, one could not, at first sight, tell" (Brontë 250). This description of another woman, one who had seen the horrors represented in Rochester is crass and cold. Antoinette is rendered as nothing, outside of the norm, and made irrelevant because of her madness. Jane does not see it at the time but she is looking at a mirror representation of what she would become if she submitted herself to Rochester's whims.

Where *Jane Eyre* is filled with colorful imagery of dreary landscapes, crumbling mansions, screaming ghost-like waifs, and betrayal, it all is viewed through Jane's eyes as an English woman searching for independence in a world dominated by men and their whims. The fact that Rochester is the tall, dark, handsome stranger who sweeps Jane off of her feet seems formulaic and trite when his character flaws show him to be just as human as she is. Jane does not ask him to save her, nor does she ask for his promises of fidelity, yet he leads her through circles of intense desire and cold ambition at turns. All of Jane's adult life is subjected to how she interacts with Rochester and where he fits into her plans. Jane does not see until it is almost too late that Rochester is the villain of the

piece–not the hero—where it concerns his previous wife and their relationship, though she forgives him because of her love for the taciturn man.

The reader can see that the fears expressed within *Jane Eyre* center around female independence and societal scandal, but while these appear in *Wide Sargasso Sea* also, they are not the core of that story. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is about narrative voice and identity of self in a mixed microcosm of society where race and speculation are deemed as scandalous subjects, never meant to be spoken of in polite society. Katja de Winter states that "Antoinette starts her narrative at a point in her life when all the stability factors she knew so far fail" (23). Narrative is stability, both for mental clarity and identity of self. Antoinette has already lost her home, her family, her sense of self, and her identity with Rochester renaming of her and moving her away from all that she knows. In the narrative, she calls England "cold" and for a creature of the sun, of the islands, this is as disorienting for her as if she had been placed in a mental asylum. Antoinette's ability to tell her story is a linear progression in her mind of the events that surrounded her. She is able to dispute the lies that others are constantly spewing and give an accurate accounting. Where Antoinette loses the narrative is when her mind shatters, or where her husband has tried to take control of her story from her.

The importance of Antoinette being able to tell her own story is stressed when she takes over the narration from him in the end. She is staking her claim on her identity, reaffirming her place in the cosmos of her thoughts, and trying to impart how much of her personality has been pushed under the weight of Rochester's tactics. Antoinette's voice has become choppy as she loses time, but the identifiers of being a Cosway, a Mason, West Indian, Creole are all in her descriptions of the room that she is kept in. Her

attic room acts like the mental shackles being enforced on her mind, the physical restraint of not being able to move freely, and a thick claustrophobia in relation to the absence of the sun. In her mind, Britain is a rainy country with the sun rarely making a full appearance, it is constantly filled with coldness and she associates that with the aloofness of the Englishmen on the island as well as her husband

Wide Sargasso Sea addresses Rochester's character through the eyes of his young wife, Antoinette, and is presented in the same autobiographical style as *Jane Eyre*, but that is where similarities end. This is where it deviates from the Gothic formula by inserting a fundamental spiritual connection to the African principles that have taken root in Dominica/Jamaican society. Bertha Antoinette Cosway Mason is the epitome of Creole society; she submerses herself in the religion of the island, in the belief of the people, in the culture of the dance and storytelling. She knows the people of the island, knows what they think of her and her family's legacy, yet she tries to include her new husband in her life only to have him spurn her with each new rumor that he hears. As a Gothic text, *Wide Sargasso Sea* works incredibly well with its 'madwoman in the attic' trope, sense of betrayal and otherness that permeates the story. There is a cycle of fire and devastation that starts at the beginning of the novel and works its way to the end with the destruction of Thornfield Hall, a scene that is played out in both *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Antoinette, now called Bertha, narrates in her mind her final willful act against her husband's tyranny and lies. The thoughts are not malicious but freeing because she sees a clear destination for herself. Fire, the light of a candle, illuminates those pathways that have been dark for too long in her mind. She easily acknowledges that by saying, "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been

a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage," (Rhys 112) as she leaves the room that she had been imprisoned in. This is the clearest that her thinking has been in a long while, she sees a way to end the torment that she has been placed in and avenge herself of the lies that Rochester has told of and about her. In a way, she is doing Jane a favor by punishing the man who would be her husband, Antoinette is teaching him to be humble while destroying his link to his past as he did to hers. She is forcing him to feel as she did by being locked away in the prison of her own mind.

In the chapter "Burning Down the House: Daughterly Revision in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*" by Caroline Rody, the reader is given another perspective of Antoinette/Bertha's willful desecration of all that Rochester holds dear. She suggests that it was Rhys's way of appropriating the Gothic for her own views in *Wide Sargasso Sea* thusly made it as important in context as *Jane Eyre*. Rody stated that "the intertextual pairing of Rhys's revision and its canonical mother text has itself become canonical, has come to typify the late-century feminist relationship of legacy and resistance to traditions of women's writing, as well as the postcolonial appropriation of canonical European texts" (133). This practice of resistance in women's writing, a breaking away from the stereotypical response by use of revolutionary means, as a method of stating willfulness is a feminist theory that disregards who Jean Rhys was and subsequently who Antoinette was made to be as a character. Rody looks at Antoinette from a gender point of view but not a racial one where she is a part of a culture that is far from European as it is descended from parts of it.

By using Antoinette as the main voice in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Jean Rhys makes the narration more honest. Antoinette has nothing to hide in regards to her feelings or in her own value of her worth. It is when she tries to mold herself into what she believes that her husband wants that she loses the last tenuous hold that she has with Jamaica. This attribution also focuses on the theme of ghosts that have been present in Gothic novels. Antoinette becomes a ghostly image of herself, losing her mind when she is shut away in a land far away from her understanding. Though not physically dead, it can be argued that she is spiritually at a loss of who she is now required to be. "It is therefore not surprising that, in many postcolonial Gothic narratives, the focus is on the possession of the "civilized" by the local characteristics of those once-unknown and now-civilized places" (Gelder 192). England is neither her home, nor anything remotely what she is used to and that is seen in the cold way that Rochester has in turn treated her, and allowed for his servants to treat her. In many ways, Antoinette's situation is now a mirror reflection of her mother's from the beginning of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

Where articulations of the anxieties of a marginalized group are realized within the larger communities' scope, the Gothic novel brings context to the societal themes and pressures that are inherent. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is the story of *Jane Eyre* told from the distinctive perspective of a West Indian woman within an Africanized locale. This setting explains the duality of nature that both the characters and the people surrounding them have to navigate. Tales of subjugation and woe are explored with minute detail in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where they were glossed over in *Jane Eyre*. The distinctive lack of European knowledge of the African people in the novel is testament to the social identity

and complete disregard for certain cultural significances such as understanding the subjugated peoples' role at large.

Dave Kuhne argues that, "African settings have appealed to English authors since the very beginnings of the English novel" (11). This questions that presence of Africans as part of the setting, instead of just being characters within it. The intricate way that Africans approached the material world is expounded upon in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, as well as how this knowledge permeated the cultural identity of those who lived within their sphere of influence. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* spirituality, language, gender roles, and social status are defined not by European standards but by those that the Africans brought into the New World with them. The European Gothic texts are opened in how they deal with post-colonial thought, yet are significantly tethered to the strictures of what has been done before. By infusing the African subtexts into this genre, New World writers are able to expand upon the complex ideas with fresh eyes and a racially diverse setting that questions the validity of sole European oration. *Wide Sargasso Sea* by Jean Rhys struggles to encompass both mediums and cultural views.

African diaspora dialogues by way of literary texts are often placed into the back burner for public consumption, but when they are allowed to shine; their narratives paint a more colorful and clear picture of the realities that transpired during forced coexistence. The European pen has always had solid footing in the world's literary canon; their perspective is the foundational cornerstone on which all other texts are measured. This is wrong because the assumption that other cultural works must meet a European standard is not only prejudicial but takes for granted the rich historical and cultural backgrounds of the authors who are navigating the gothic landscape. The African continent has either

influenced or been used as a cultural scapegoat in European literature, and it begs the question of why. Jean Rhys's West Indian heritage and childhood form her writing style; it's shaped her views on normalcy and the culture that tries to force women authors into certain genres. By taking on the challenge of furthering the dialogue in Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* is not only a feminist text or a Gothic text but an African diaspora text also. Her background and the cultural influences in the West Indies give the novel a decidedly all-encompassing perspective while retaining Gothic notes.

CHAPTER 3

From Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* to Octavia Butler's *Fledgling:* Female Vampires as Metaphors for Race, Power, Miscegenation, and Sexuality

In the realm of Gothic horror and speculative fiction one question seems to saturate the mind: what is a vampire? The answer can be as simple as a monster with the face of an angel or a demon that drinks blood but it is more complicated than that. A vampire can be a metaphor for society's ills or perceived problems: stereotypes about race, fear of miscegenation, perceptions of power, and untamed sexuality. Ken Gelder claims that the vampire represents a "Self-image, a means of figuring socio-political-sexual excesses which, although represented as foreign, actually lie much closer to home" (43). This level of "otherness" is the way in which Gothic authors contend with having a preternatural creature that can mimic base human traits in literature. The European mythos has formulated in the archetype of the vampire an image of the sexual deviant, the ghastly, the strange other that has to be repelled at all costs, and this image has permeated various cultural narratives with increasing regularity. Though the vampire is found in some form within various cultures, the European concept has overlapped the more traditional beliefs of those areas to create a static being, one that is stagnating in its rigidity. With stereotypically reproduced weaknesses such as an aversion to sunlight, the fear of holy objects, an insatiable need for blood and an inability to cross running water,

these type of vampires have been seen in film and literary texts as the only relevant type to exists within the human imagination.

To understand how the narrative is being forced to change, the reader must first deconstruct the European history of the vampire. The word vampire comes from the German *vampir* which has Serbian roots and firmly establishes its unique place in European ontology and oration. The vampire is a strange class of revenant, a deceased individual who has resumed living through the ingestion of blood from living beings for its continued existence. This is a creature of myth and danger, yet one that is always on the cusp of becoming something more; whether this is achieved through their unearthly beauty, viciousness, or by their determination to do the extraordinary. While the means of its inception varies greatly within each region, one thing connects all European vampire mythos: they are pale representations of life. This conceptual image has become the accepted standard in horror movies and literary fiction with only minor subtext attributed towards racial concerns.

It was not until Bram Stoker penned *Dracula* in 1897 that Western Europe was given a particular template to follow. The vampire had to be foreign—either Romanian or Slavic in origin—and beautiful, or handsome, beyond belief. It had to be alluring with deep-set eyes that drew their victim into their embrace. What marked this creature as more than human was Stoker's description of Dracula in Jonathan Harker's journals. He wrote, "But my very feelings changed to repulsion and terror when I saw the whole man slowly emerge from the window and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings" (Stoker 39). A vampire by its very definition is something to be pushed away and

repulsed and the human guise that it wears is only on the surface. The template provided for ways of dealing with a creature by making it be vulnerable to religious paraphernalia commonly found within even a parson's church: crucifix, holy water, communion wafers, and a bible.

Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's 1871 novel *Carmilla* preceded Bram Stoker's *Dracula* by twenty-six years, though Stoker's work was inherently more popular and long-reaching. *Carmilla* expanded the European mythos by addressing female sexuality and the patriarchal complexities that ruled in during the specific time period. Women were held to an impossible standard of repression and binary gendered hypocrisy. In *Carmilla*, issues of queerness, female empowerment, and revolt against assigned gender norms are hidden under flowery prose and the recognition of self within the form of the monster. "The gothic novel, emerging at the moment battle lines of cultural reorganization were being formed in the later eighteenth century shimmers with subversive potential" (Haggerty 10). Gothic literature defies predetermined ideas about the "natural" order of human sexuality that negates queerness in any of its forms. There are some lingering questions of how contemporaries of Le Fanu would have seen *Carmilla*. Would they have written scathing articles about the work and considered it to be dangerous and deviant? Would the Victorian attitudes of the time have exorcised the text from "decent" household libraries, or would fathers have hidden copies in their personal studies to "protect" the delicate sensibilities of their daughters? This notion would have been a self-delusionary myth that men were taught as their duty to house and family, while negating the reality of feminine knowledge, power, and desire. Ellis Hansen makes the assertion

that “Late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century culture needed childhood innocence to fill out a certain kind of self projection” (qtd. Haggerty 134).

Le Fanu's novel, *Carmilla* is richly endowed with themes of race, miscegenation and female sexuality (lesbianism) and sets a framework for discussion through its narrative. There is speculation by Jim Hansen that because both Le Fanu and Stoker were Irish authors that they used the physical and political oppression of their people by the British to fuel their vampire narratives. He postulates that the Irish were stigmatized as being both a savage and strangely feminine race because Ireland was referred to as a “sister kingdom” to England and the traditional forms of literature including masculine Irish-language poetics had begun to disappear from the lexicon. Hanson states that, “In light of this transformation, an Irish masculinity coded by the Western male/female binary as masculine also fell into the category of an overarching Irish identity coded as feminine” (4). It can be argued that Le Fanu and Stoker, being familiar with this British disdain provided characters that were decidedly English in their predatory behaviors to fight back against the illogical narration about their ethnicity and the gender norms in their country. Both *Carmilla* and *Dracula* are placed against English speaking characters as a way to invoke cultural awareness of weakness and strength. The English treated the Irish as less than human and the authors allowed for their oppressors to become the victims of the ‘otherness’ that they feared. They allowed for the beginning narrative to focus on dispelling the myth that the Irish were not cultured or civilized, and that their historical relevance was defined by the English view of the world.

Carmilla is the story of Laura and the vampiress, Carmilla. *Carmilla* approaches many topics such as: gender roles, feminine sexuality, classism, the justification of

murder and grave desecration. The use of this particular vampire myth is distinctly European. It is flavored with Germanic and Romanian mythos as well as the Irish Bainsidhe and Woman in White myths which are used for the building of the character of Carmilla. The Bainsidhe, more commonly pronounced Banshee, is an Irish spirit of the dead. This is usually a damned soul of a witch, murderess, or suicide victim which wails to signal an oncoming death. Likewise, the Woman in White myth alludes to a similar being in several cultures that does the same. Seen as an avatar of death, the Bainsidhe was to be avoided and their wailing song never heard.

The setting of *Carmilla* is in Styria, a remote locale where the nearest neighbors and villages are measured in distance of leagues. Laura and her father live in a *schloss*—castle—with only the servants as company. Laura has been anxiously awaiting a visit from Bertha Rheinfeldt, the niece of General Spielsdorf. When news of Bertha's sudden death reaches Laura, and her father, she is understandably upset at the loss of a potential friend and here enters Carmilla, a lovely young girl who is left behind by her mother after an unexpected accident. A dramatic entrance into the household by way of a crashing chariot and fainting spell endears the young woman to the family.

Carmilla is sweet, languid, and unerringly beautiful. Laura's father consents to allow her to stay with them, never knowing the danger in which he is placing his daughter. Carmilla and Laura become the best of friends, companions, closer than sisters; they share a level of familiarity that is almost twin-like. Carmilla has a tendency to flirt with Laura and press kisses to her cheeks as she hugs her. Laura is torn between mild discomfort at the attention and happiness in having a friend. Carmilla utters words softly to Laura which she thinks that she does not hear such as: "Love will have its sacrifices.

No sacrifice without blood" (Le Fanu 45). Blood in this case meaning life and what is more important to a vampire than being able to live: to have the essence of life infusing into their bodies.

Carmilla fights her desires to weaken and feed upon Laura by attacking the girls from the nearest village. She takes on the shape of an enormous black cat, maybe a panther, as she stalks them and visits Laura at night. She is a creature of two worlds: walking in the physical while being a member of the spiritual. Carmilla has power: over emotions, sexuality, physicality, and the mind. She is exploitive when using her abilities, especially when it comes to Laura. The story has a moderate build-up with the unusual circumstance surrounding Carmilla and the deaths of many young women. Carmilla disappears from a locked room, she is not seen during the early part of the day, and she never prays. She goes into a rage when a funeral procession singing hymns for one of her victims passes by her. It is after this that Laura starts to feel strangely and becomes secretive: "A strange melancholy was stealing over me, a melancholy that I would not have interrupted" (Le Fanu 50).

Why did Carmilla only prey on young women? Did Le Fanu link the story to the legend of the Hungarian countess Elizabeth Báthory, a woman who targeted young women and bathed in their blood? How does the line between legend and story play into the sensuality of Carmilla's seduction of Laura? *Carmilla* speaks of a promise of blood and passion, of sacrilege, profaneness and the eventual acceptance of fate. The character never hides her true self for all that she misguides the people that she lives with; she knows that she has a lust for blood, for life, this is barely contained in her small form, especially when she tells Laura: "I live in you; and you would die for me, I love you so"

(Le Fanu 41). This love could be for Laura's person or for the life that she contains within it and Carmilla speaks to that essence within the naïve, young woman.

Her presence is so strong an influence on Laura that even years later after she has been stopped and her corpse consigned to flame, Laura is left with the impression of Carmilla being around her:

> "It was long before the terror of recent events subsided; and to this hour the image of Carmilla returns to memory with ambiguous alterations—sometimes that playful, lounging beautiful girl; sometimes the writhing fiend I saw in the ruined church; and often from a reverie I have heard the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door" (Le Fanu 96).

Carmilla leaves an indelible fingerprint on Laura that continues to shape her long into adulthood. As a character, Carmilla embodies the essence of womanhood, sensuality, and the power within the female form. She contains the primeval ability to shift forms, to make her form into something new, and she uses this to her advantage throughout the story.

Octavia Butler challenged the commonly known lore of vampires in her 2007 novel, *Fledgling*. Butler Africanizes the paradigm of what constitutes a vampire by adding subtle facets of community, self-awareness, and female empowerment with each line written by introducing the world to Shori Matthews, her protagonist. What Butler imagines as a new form of vampiric creature draws on African text and morality as well as science fiction and fantastical elements to define perceptional shifts in long accepted truths. *Fledgling* deviates from the narrative of the European vampire mythos by questioning elements of race, miscegenation, and feminine sexuality.

Upon its release, *Fledgling* garnered social criticism based on the visual concept of a pre-teen African American girl becoming sexualized. The hypocrisy of the initial criticism is blatant in its disregard for the centuries of American canon that has viewed black female bodies either as sexualized or animalistic and repulsive. Butler's narrative seeks to break down the stereotypes of black femininity as non-existent, black sexuality as dirty and therefore non-powerful. Weaving together the essential qualities of multigenerational community, loss of history and culture, and the ability to survive through harrowing experiences, Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* follows the traditions of the Slave Narrative, the honesty of the Harlem Renaissance and the dark elements of Gothic literature.

Fledgling is more detailed and interlaces with the Gothic genre in ways that *Carmilla* only scratches the surface. Where *Carmilla* discusses sexuality and female empowerment, *Fledgling*'s addition of race, African communal themes, and survival against all odds resonates with the 21st-century reader. Butler created a vampire race called the Ina, beings who are tall, willowy, and very pale; they are in essence the stereotypical vampire. The Ina is a nocturnal race, eschewing the sun because it wounds them terribly. Shori, the main character and narrator of the novel, does not have this problem as she is the product of a genetic experiment to add melanin into the racial profile of the group. She has the ability to stay awake during the day, heal rapidly, and yet she has all of the other traits of the Ina, including strength and speed.

For centuries, the Ina have been tall, pale individuals who blend into human society along the edges. They live within compounds and have available to them a turned human, or a symbiont. The Ina's symbionts are the coexisting "herd" on which the

vampires feed. They have a symbiotic relation not unlike the ghoul Renfield has with Bram Stoker's character, Dracula. The symbionts provide blood while engaging in a sexualized relationship with their particular Ina. They are daytime protectors, farmers, and parental units for the next generation who are placed in the care. Initially all of Shori's symbionts are murdered when her family is destroyed and she has to start the process of gathering a new group for her survival, two of the new symbionts she takes in belonged to her father's household. It is discovered through the novel's plot that a percentage of the elder Ina, particularly the Silk family, are disgusted by the experiment that resulted in Shori's birth.

Wright Hamlin, Shori's symbiont, makes the observation that she is being hunted because of three reasons, one of which was because she was African American. He tells the Ina who take her in that "…it's happening because Shori is black, and racists—probably Ina racists—don't like the idea that a good part of the answer to your daytime problems is melanin" (Butler 147). The species lives in compounds separated by gender lines and in different locales, the sons live with the father in one while the daughters live with the mothers in another. In *Fledgling*, the Ina is a semi-isolationist, matriarchal society where the women are in control of their own compounds, a concept that Butler pulls from many African micro-nations.

The narrative of the story starts with Shori awakening in a cave terribly burned, hungry, blind and suffering from memory loss. In the novel's very first line Shori states that, "I awoke to darkness" (Butler 1). Visibly she is a ten-year-old African American female, but physically she is stronger and faster than any mere human. She feeds upon a large animal over the course of several days, healing and regaining her eyesight. During

her excursions out of the cave, she arrives at the burned out village which was once her home and obtains clothing so that she is not naked. Shori does not remember the village, or the personal impact that it has on her history. She is forced to decide between exploring further or finding more food. As more of her memories come back, Shori finds herself hunted by men wielding guns and gasoline; she in effect becomes the hunted in a scene reminiscent of slave catchers during the antebellum South.

Shori eventually has to make her way to her father's compound in search of answers. He tells her the truth about her identity and why she was born, to save their race for better integration. He invites her to join them to keep her safe, but never comes for her or Wright. When eventually finds out what happened to her, she learns that her father, Iosif, and brothers have been murdered, the compound that they live in burned to ashes and she is left with the decision of trying to protect the only two symbionts left alive, Celia and Brooke. Shori's narrative describes the grisly scene of realization:

> "When I found my father's and brothers' homes, they looked much like the ruin of my mothers' community. The buildings had been completely destroyed, burned to rubble, and then trampled by many feet. My father and my brothers had been there, but they were gone now. I could smell death" (Butler 97).

She has become an underage matriarch for a family that is nearly extinct within a race of people that cling to their traditions and a small faction who do not want her to live because she is anathema to all of their beliefs.

When Milo Silk, an Ina of five hundred and forty-one years, addresses the council that has been brought together to deliberate his family's crimes against Shori, he is described as having spoken "condescendingly of human symbionts" (Butler 233) and

contemptuously of the young girl. The entire novel is fraught with tension and darkness dogging on her heels and she is forced to become an adult mentally while her body struggles to catch up. She has conflicting desires, conflicting loyalties and a core of strength that is powerful to view as it emerges through her trials and tribulations

Butler's idea of using a Human/Ina hybrid as a way to ensure the continuance of a species facing a slow destruction has repercussion and parallels with the real world. She had written a story that focused on of how miscegenation could possibly ease racial tensions, or erase them completely. Human beings are described as being on a destructive path with wars, bigotry, diseases, and starvation. Butler seems to be asking, how are the Ina supposed to survive unless they can embrace new ideas. Octavia Butler does not shy away from the racism that has slowly started to infect the Ina society; in fact, she has an open dialogue between several of the characters and Shori where she makes a point of describing facial expressions and inflammatory language.

The intersectional nature of *Carmilla* and *Fledgling* questions the relevancy of how such emotional baggage in language comes the narration. The character of Milo Silk embodies outdated ideas of racial divisiveness and sterilized feminine sexuality. Milo is by all appearances privileged European male patriarchy dressed up as an alien species. Both novels challenge that assumption in their texts. On first glance, Le Fanu's work can be seen as both patriarchal and oppressive on initial reading, yet it has content that was disturbing to the vast majority of Victorian society. He wrote a love story that features two women who recognize in each other the potential for something more permanent than simple passion. Lesbianism was the unmentionable sin of society and to even hint at it in *Carmilla* made him a target for speculation and increased scrutiny. In this same vein,

Octavia Butler pushed forth with an uncomfortable idea of survival due to racial mixing and feminine sexuality within the mind, not the body. *Fledgling* aims to place the reader into an awkward situation of acknowledging sexuality as fundamental to the being, while presenting it in an otherwise impalpable form: that of a visibly underage African American female.

Both novels can be positioned in the Gothic strata as they follow the themes and motifs that are part of the literary canon. Starting with the ways that *Carmilla* works as a Gothic novel and then exploring the same with *Fledgling* can help narrow the focus of their narratives. Both works are about female vampires that seek out blood for sustaining their lives and forming symbiotic relationships with a select number of partners. For Carmilla it is with Laura that an emotional and sexual connection is established while she regulates her feeding on the poor villagers. Shori on the other hand feeds and forms a symbiotic attachment with her "symbionts" who are both male and female. Both female characters are sexualized, though Carmilla's is hidden behind the thin veneer of steadfast friendship instead of an obvious lover type relationship of which Shori is in engaged.

The narratives of *Carmilla* and *Fledgling* are about positions of power obtained through ingenuity and survival instinct. There are certain similarities between the characters Carmilla and Shori that are immediately recognizable, both female vampires that are visually underage and have a sexualized mentality about them, neither female vampire is embarrassed to hunt or feed as needed nor do they contain their victims to the opposite gender. Both Shori and Carmilla are huntresses within a decidedly male literary canon and are unapologetic about how their presence affects the Gothic narrative. Is this phenomenon in part because of who their authors are or because of the subject matter that

they broached? That question is answered in the dialogue as spoken by both young vampires. There is a loving like lilt to their speech patterns where Carmilla seems to be slightly affected, but Shori's is more genuine. Carmilla is used to seducing her victims and being held above the needs of mere mortals, while Shori is learning to navigate social norms with compassion in the face of blatant racism.

Haggerty argues that when Carmilla delves into her sexual nature she looks past age and ability to a wanton desire for company. In this way she begins grooming a future companion when she is introduced to Laura as a young girl. Haggerty says this ghostly occurrence "introduces the eponymous Carmilla into the bedroom of Laura, when she is still a little girl" (134) and marks the beginning of a long seduction that has repercussions for the young women that are hunted for sport in the time between their meetings. Carmilla is cutting a deadly swathe through the country population in her desire, her need, to not be alone and certain male figures in the story object to her intentions with Laura.

In *Fledgling*, Octavia Butler's introduction of pigmentation within race studies the kneejerk reaction of difference. The Ina are a "pure" people who are trying to survive but are looking to limit the ways for this survival. They want to stay as they have been yet reap the benefits of social integration with their food source. Gregory Jerome Hampton states that "the melanin in Shori's skin allows her to survive in the light of day, it threatens the purity of the Ina/vampire race as well as presents the possibility of racial evolution. Shori threatens the utopian society of the Ina because she is half human and because her human identity is compounded with a racial difference" (118). This perceived utopian society is a lie that has been used in Speculative fiction to justify a

homogenous future devoid of any racial variance, a notion that Butler faces headlong with pointing out how racism infects even the 'superior' Ina. Works like Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* are amongst some popular examples of this trope.

The Silk family does not want Shori's genes to eventually mar their family and seeks out a way to destroy her, and any possible way to recreate the experiment that gave her life. It is only because they commit mass genocide upon her family that they are punished, and not because they hold opinions that she is inferior to them. Shori has several advantages over the "pure" Ina that make her a better genetic version than her predecessors, but it is because of racial blindness that she is constantly treated as if she is mentally unstable and weak. At one point, Russel, the eldest son of the Silk family, calls her a "Murdering black mongrel bitch" (Butler 300) for having the audacity to defend herself from their genocidal ambitions. Instead of taking responsibility for his and his family's actions, he places the blame solely on the shoulders of an underage child.

Both *Carmilla* and *Fledgling* use first person narration to tell the story. This allows for the reader to see the situation, consequences, and outcomes from inside of the character's mind. By submersing their own intellect into that of the character's, the reader is forced to push aside preconceived notions and suspend a certain amount of disbelief while recognizing the validity of the different point of view. These characters are telling their story, they are seeking validation as any normal person would, though *Fledgling* is told from Shori's viewpoint and *Carmilla* is from Laura's. The reader becomes the character and feels either sadness for Laura in *Carmilla* or righteous anger with Shori in *Fledgling*; both emotions target that feeling of inclusiveness that the authors seemed to

want to engender. Laura's sadness is rooted in having lost Carmilla, a close friend and possible love interest who lingers on her mind. Carmilla formed the early development of Laura's desires by awakening in her the knowledge of self. Shori's righteous anger comes from having the ability to avenge the massacre of her family as well as her symbiont who was murdered while residing in a safe haven. She cements her place in Ina society as a matriarch when she stops Katharine Dahlman, one of the Silks, from killing her or the rest of her symbionts by tearing her throat out and breaking her neck.

The subject matter of both novels is expanded by introducing the topics that have been marginalized in the majority of Gothic fiction: women's real feelings and perspectives and racial bias. For members of a patriarchal society both novels make for an uncomfortable truth, that women are living, breathing creatures with desires and wants of their own, and that they do not have to depend on men for the definition of self. Yet, for the Anglo-normative culture, the novels explore the idea that there is worth in other races and that a blind narrative helps no one in the literary canon. *Carmilla* is a novel set is Styria with a classic European vampire who happens to be female and with lesbian desires, while *Fledgling* puts into perspective the hypocrisy of racial divides. This is especially visibly where sexual behaviors and attitudes come into play as well as the ingestion of blood to sustain life. Bruce Clarke has posited that "Shori's taking of blood is more proprietary. Shori's relationships are indeed symbiotic, but they are compounded by the fact that her body is black without a remembered history and prepubescent yet more than half a century old. Nonetheless, even with the biotechnological updating that Butler performs in *Fledgling*, the vampirism evoked remains a form of posthuman

transformation contingent upon premodern convictions about blood as the essence of life and racial identity." (166).

The modern view of sexuality and the consequences of fetishizing can be seen in *Fledgling* by the age/race parallels in the novel. Shori is desired for her "otherness" and reviled for it at the same time. She is visually a ten-year-old child who is engaging in semi-sexual practices before she hits puberty. She is considered for her potential genetics rather than her actual age when it comes to dealings with other Ina. The symbionts are the people who actually look at her age and see a problem with her sexualization, all of who are adult human beings. This parallel between race, age and culture was a common plot device that Octavia Butler used to discuss American attitudes towards African Americans. Gregory J. Hampton looks at how Shori feeds and the power she derives from the act as being vampiric and thus marking her as "other" than human. He states that "Shori's taking of blood is more proprietary. Shori's relationships are indeed symbiotic, but they are compounded by the fact that her body is black without a remembered history and prepubescent yet more than half a century old" (Hampton 120).

The Victorian attitude towards sex and queerness in *Carmilla* can be seen in the rabid condemnation of the novel at the time of publication. Women are supposed to be calm, cool, collected with no visible desires of their own according to the Victorian idea of female sexuality. Victoria Nelson's opinion is that *Carmilla* deviated so much from the standard patriarchal norm that the novel became a focus for all anti-queer aggression. She states that "female monsters of the order of Sheridan Le Fanu's predatory female vampire Carmilla are the exceptions to the rule" (Nelson 198). The character engages in

stereotypical hetero male cis-normative behaviors and is unapologetic about it. She looks at women in the same way that men have been described as doing.

Carmilla is the unspoken 'other' that threatens masculinity because she navigates through it with a winding step; it is up to the male characters to 'put' her back into her place. Gina Wisker reasons that "The advances of the female vampire represent dangerous sexual deviance, a challenge to patriarchal controls" (126). A woman who cannot be controlled by a man's rules is a dangerous creature and Le Fanu showed in the novel how violent the reaction to such a being can be. Murder and desecration of graves is seen as a viable option in 'defending' their women's honor from such a deviant. Notice that defending is used in a sarcastic way as the male characters follow more stereotypical behavioral patterns for oppression than the monster that they are fighting against. *Carmilla* made the stoic and patriarchal society of Victorian England quake in terror because it dared to insinuate that women were sexual creatures with desires and needs of their own.

The stereotypes engendered in Victorian literature, and perpetuated in Modern texts about vampires, are being revolted against in *Carmilla* and *Fledgling*. Author Jewelle Gomez contends that the sexual nature of vampiric desire, from the embrace to the longing looks, are as indicative of sexual desire as well as bloodlust. She states that when Laura meets Carmilla in a dream that she displays "symptoms of love or desire" (Gomez 85) or what was commonly referred to as "the vapors." Her physical reaction is visible, unlike what most Victorian women have been described as. Shori takes to exploring a semi-sexual relationship with her symbionts as her right and Carmilla hunts women as naturally as breathing. In following Gomez, Eugenia DeLamotte's premise of

the Gothic includes a stance on the "presumed biological stability and moral, intellectual, spiritual significance of the physical markers of difference between groups of people" (26) is arguably the question of whether the normative idea of Anglo-Saxon self as the default has any internally moral or psychological boundaries for the view of biological lines as divisionary. To deviate from the norm causes an unbalanced view in the original narrative and forces readers to explore a new perception.

Both Hampton and Gomez suggest that Octavia Butler sought to clear up the misconceptions of racial inferiority when she penned *Fledgling*. Like Le Fanu, Butler injects the narrative with similar elements to make the initial process easy for the reader to fall into the story but that she attacked the representation of feminine rational thought. Scholars have proposed that "Butler's fiction suggests that the black female body not only survives in dystopian environments, but thrives" (Hampton 117) and is persistent in saying that "power, isolation, recreating a family, fulfilling desire, maintaining honor, sharing" (Gomez 86) are the central themes of all Gothic literature. Butler wrote *Fledgling* to encompass more than that original literary canon, allowing for debate between the author and the reader.

Tananarive Due's stated opinion is that Octavia Butler had a "fierce disappointment with humankind's worse habits" (277) and that she was not shy in exploring every seedy and deviant inch in search of truth is evident in the subject matter of racial reconciliation and newer options for Gothic narratives. The Gothic has always been described as a family affair in perpetuity of being courted by destructive tendencies. Whether these tendencies are through racial divides, sexual stigmas, illogical fear, or reason being pushed aside, therein lies the ground work for Butler's novel. She took

away the instinctive reaction of protection of the feminine form and pushed forward with the idea that not only are women strong, but that black women are forged through the adversity that they face on a daily basis. Butler just framed the narrative within a fictional context to make it slightly more palatable. Octavia Butler thrilled in making readers uncomfortable with her stories; she used their fear to address racism, the fear of mixing, and the blatant disrespect for feminine sexuality. *Fledgling* is her artistic triumph because she challenged the view that "behind the fears of dark, racialized others on which the Gothic construction of whiteness hinges is the unspeakable Other or that construction: the fear that there is no such thing as whiteness, or even race" (DeLamotte 17).

CHAPTER 4

Slave Narratives by Any Other Name: The Gothic Specters in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, and Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour*

The slave narrative has taken on many forms in the American literary canon with varying degrees of subjection and abjection discussed. It has never been more accessible, or as acceptable to start a discussion, as it is in the fiction of Toni Morrison, Maryse Condé, and Anne Rice. The haunting specters of the dead in these texts form pinpoints in a time that is considered a dark blot on American history. These novels take the gothic trope of a hidden world that interacts with our own and expanded it in an undeviating manner for a more thorough discussion regarding the importance of the slave narrative within fiction. *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé focuses on the story of Tituba Indian during the Salem Witch trials and how her living and dying accounts shaped the belief in spiritual rebirth and phantasmal permanence. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* shifts the idea of the slave narrative towards cycles of vengeance and forgiveness with the presence of the ghost in the house. Finally, Anne Rice's *The Witching Hour* shows the influence of African culture and spirituality while discussing the ghost Lasher and his ties to the Mayfair family in New Orleans.

Arthur Redding speculates in *Haints* that:

> …the claim that no individual or collective identity can be forged without reference to the dead--both those dead whose sacrifice and loss we honor and recognize and whom we mourn and bury honorably in the walls of our cities, and, more critically, those dead we forget, dismiss, or despise: the enemy dead or the unburied, the hordes of the nameless dead, whose disappearance clears the ground

> for our living existence, those dead *haints* who nonetheless lay claim to our being (18-19).

Each of these three texts has a ghost, or assemblage of ghosts, who interact with the physical realm and follows the main character or a surrogate throughout the narrative. The ephemeral spirits of the novels take on physical roles, affect change in the real world, and also act as place holders for topics of discussion like rape, slavery, brutality, anti-miscegenation, subjugation, abjection, spirituality, and fading ties with indigenous cultures. It is the purpose of this essay to navigate through the fine line that differentiates fiction and reality within gothic tropes surrounding the manifestation of spirits. Keith Cartwright postulates that "There is a past waiting for us all, a "nightmare" of history in which we find ourselves reenacting the old narrative scripts, consigned by ideologies and language itself to follow old designs" (225). This "nightmare of history" that Cartwright talks about can be seen in the advent of the slave narrative and the documentation of life in colonial and post-colonial areas around the world.

Slave narratives as literary text have been recorded since 1789, the very first account written by Olaudah Equiano and published in Great Britain. They were retellings of brutalities and life during the Enslavement period in the New World. These narratives would spread to other slave holding colonies in the North American continent and the Caribbean. Examples of well-known slave narratives include *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, *The Bondswoman's Narrative* by Hannah Crafts, *The Autobiography of Frederick Douglass* by Frederick Douglass, and *Harriet, the Moses of Her People* by Sarah Hopkins Bradford. The high rate of illiteracy amongst African American slaves in part is because of the Slave Codes that forbade teaching them to read or write. Because those actions were punishable by beatings or death, many of the

narratives were delivered in the oral tradition and transcribed by publishers or writers. The first of these laws was enacted in North Carolina in 1740 and spread to other colonies from there. These codes were designed at keeping Africans and their descendants from seeking freedom from the institution of slavery by keeping them dependent on the slavers and overseers.

The deplorable arrangement instigated by the subjection and abjection of African bodies and minds was explored through the use of the slave narrative. Myths about the "happy slave", the "mammy", the "wanton jezebel", and the "childish negress/negro" were put up against the blatantly racist institution of slavery and revealed to be more appalling than originally considered. Human beings were treated as chattel, their humanity not recognized, their bodies abused, their families sundered for monetary gain and their experiences disregarded as a pittance. Elizabeth West called slave narratives "windows that offer glimpses of slave life from first hand experiences" (65). For those who wanted to understand the plight of African diasporic people in the Americas, the slave narrative gave them insightful and valuable information. Slave owners and overseers who had fed into the national story that Africans were the descendants of Ham, and therefore should be enslaved like their ancestor, were exposed for their fraudulent claims and abuses against other human beings; people were being humiliated and punished based upon the color of their skin through the twisting of scripture from the Bible. Slavery had been sanctioned by the Catholic Church as being morally right and Christians were taught that it was the nature of the African to be enslaved; in reality, it was about economics and profit. As long as the mind was kept weak then slaves would

not look for freedom nor advanced from their situation, or so the slave owners may have thought.

This belief prevailed throughout the entirety of the Enslavement period and its dire effects are still seen in the 21st-century's relations when dealing with race, gender, sexuality, and spiritualism. Julia Kristeva articulates that "There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). An institution that took away the humanity of African diasporic people has been immortalized in the words from their own experiences. Though fictional novels that span genres*, I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, *Beloved*, and *The Witching Hour* articulate the Gothic horror of slavery in the Americas and the long term consequences that could follow a people forcibly removed from their connection to culture, history, and spiritualism.

Gothic literature is the perfect landscape for the slave narrative to reside within through two fronts: American and African American. Tales of horror, brutal treatment, lying visages, and hidden meanings are placed in plain sight for all to decipher. People become characters, locales morph into settings, and plots are built around memories in the American Gothic. These characters have to walk through a landmine filled terrain of constructed social mores, all the while avoiding ever increasing tension as outside forces control their lives. The horror of the African life in Enslavement Era America is vivid in the imagination of the reader. Marianne Noble writes in her essay "An Ecstasy of Apprehension: The Gothic Pleasures of Sentimental Fiction" that "Horror offers the possibility of encountering the terrifying components of the repressed unconscious, a

process that shatters the illusion of coherent subjectivity, enabling readers to imagine an ecstatic merging with the totality of existence" (174). Twenty-first-century readers press this knowledge into the recesses of their minds, consigning the era to a long ago period that does not touch their everyday lives.

Maisha Wester noted that between "1790 and 1830, the growing concern and debates over slavery occurred contemporaneously with the rise of the gothic novel" (18). Was it the popularity of the types of works that helped further the Abolitionist movement in the country or did the novels ground the various oppressive regimes that controlled the institution of slavery to dig in their heels over what they viewed as property and not human beings? These souls of the enslaved were in torment and after they passed through the mortal coil of the world, became ghosts. In some cases, the depression of being forced into slavery would have made them living ghosts. Their stories only told through word of mouth and passed down through the generations would give them a foothold into the world of the living.

Ghosts in Gothic literature often hide deeper social issues like memories of the past, feelings kept tightly reined right under the surface, blatant meanings in plain sight or an unspoken truth, unvarnished in its complete and open horror. A specter is supposed to be fleeting, unable to affect changes in behavior of the world but as can be gleaned from the gothic novel this is not always the case. "Long dead ancestors continue to haunt society beyond their time and lives" (Wester 66). Subliminal contexts plague the generations that are out of forced bondage; dissociative social displacement and post-traumatic stress disorder being amongst the psychological impressions guiding many of these descendants through life. Low literacy levels as a result of the pressure placed upon

ancestors who were trying to survive a hostile environment as well as nearly fractured nuclear family bonds are the negative hallmarks of slavery. On the other hand, a portion of those who had ancestors suffering through slavery retained their inherent African cultures through studied rituals of song, dance, and storytelling. This is the foundation of literary theory that would emerge from the slave narrative and African Diasporic novels that would come to fruition.

To understand the power of these particular ghosts in Gothic literature, there needs to be a fundamental knowledge of African beliefs in regard to the spiritual realm. Tobe Melora Correal looks at the double importance of the dead and how they interact with the living. She states that a "spirit in distress needs elevation, which enables a troubled ancestor to move out of darkness and into the light, so that it can fulfill its divine destiny as a force for helping the living" (Correal 82). The three novels have in essence living spirits that take on the task of guiding the main characters, of protecting them in some circumstances and punishing them in others. *I, Tituba* is full of helpful spirits that are linked directly to African mythos, specifically Yoruban, about the goddess Yemoja and her welcoming embrace for all of her children who were forcibly taken away from the continent.

Ghosts are hauntings, memories branded into the landscape and mind of people. The ghost in *Beloved* is the spirit of a murdered child who crosses into the physical realm when she is nearly exorcised from her family. *The Witching Hour*'s ghost is a pragmatic manipulator that entrenches himself into the daily affairs of the Mayfairs. All three versions of the specter are able to "live" alongside of their chosen patron, for good or ill, and the authors use distinctly African foundations of spirituality when writing about

them. Robin Horton argued in *Gods as Guests* that though these ancestors are immaterial that they have abilities that makes it possible for them to "operates at the spiritual level, sometimes they physically reenter the human world" (qtd. in Kalu 55). It is without question that the ghosts have taken on a vocal role in the lives of their people, just as if they were ancestral spirits.

When Ogbu Kalu speaks of African spirituality he states that "Death is a mere passage from the human world to the spirit world. The passage enhances the spiritual powers so that one could now operate in the human environment and especially in the human family as a guard, protective spirit/power/influence" (54). African diaspora people cling tightly to some aspects of this heritage and it manifests in literary and musical forms; it is memory, pure yet somehow indelible because of lost historical and cultural perspective. Movies, novels, songs, and plays have that one wise person who can see beyond the normal world, beyond mortal means and advises his or her family like Tituba Indian in *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*.

Written in 1986, *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* by Maryse Condé weaves a story of survival, memorializing a colorful heritage based on the struggle of one woman: Tituba Indian. Condé took on race, gender, religion, victim's guilt, revenge, and sexuality to show how perceptions can be skewed towards or against an individual. She asked tough questions like: did the color of a person's skin make him or her better than someone else; should a woman be raped because she is an aberration in a society because of her race, religion, or culture; and should a man be beaten to death because he doesn't speak the language of his captors? Instead of answering with a definitive no, Condé created a theoretical situation with the story of Tituba Indian and charted every incidence

from her conception to her death. She also discusses her importance in the afterlife and the wisdom that she was able to pass onto the people that she had claimed as her own. For J. A. Brown-Rose "This novel reflects the ways that, in their migration, Caribbean peoples maintain their culture while finding a way to "survive" in the United States. Tituba learns to survive through a celebration of her difference, which her nostalgia allows her to maintain" (58). The identity that Tituba Indian has cultivated is a distinctive mix of African and Island culture. She knows who she is, what her purpose in the world is based on the teachings of her mentor and parents, and tries to maintain that identity through her struggles in America.

The story starts with the violent rape of Tituba's mother, Abena, by a sailor onboard of the ship carrying her to the Caribbean; it lays the foundation of a narrative for a group of people separated from their ancestral lands and enslaved. When the pregnant Abena is placed with the suicidal Yao to live as his concubine, a tentative hope is stirred at the connection between the two. They are from the same tribal group, speak the same language, and have the same customs. They are not as utterly alone in an alien landscape as they had both feared that they would be. Yao thinks to himself that Abena's situation is symbolic of the catastrophe affecting them. He states that her humiliation was symbolic of the condition of their people in this new place: "defeated, dispersed, and auctioned off" (Condé 5). He raises her child as his own, naming her Tituba, and taking Abena under what protection that he can offer her.

Her life is a series of trials and tribulations with few happy moments that personified the tragedy of slavery. Tituba's earliest memories are filled with love from Yao, her adopted father, and she constantly sought out her mother's affections, which

Abena is both slow and reluctant to give. At the age of seven, her mother is hung for attacking the slave owner who tries to rape her, her father commits suicide and she is run off of the plantation. Taken under the wings of Yetunde, called Mama Yaya, she thrives and lives as a free woman, learning the ways of her ancestors and calling to spirits in search of knowledge. Tituba noted that Mama Yaya seemed to walk between worlds and always conversed with spirits, particularly her late husband and sons. "In fact, she was hardly in this world and lived completely in their company" (Condé 9). The ability to talk to spirits is the first thing that Mama Yaya taught Tituba.

Tituba's discovery of the spiritual culture of her people allowed her to learn of the importance of nature and how it connected with every living being in the world; it also allowed her to communicate with her parents. For the first time in her life, she is able to hear her mother tell her that she is loved. The spirits in Tituba's story are beneficent, protective, and vengeful when the circumstances call for it. Spirits were not regulated to one dimension in *I, Tituba*, but could travel freely and when they so desired. One night, Abena visits her daughter to give her a dire warning. Tituba recalls the message as if in a dream, "It was my mother. I hadn't called her, but I understood that an imminent danger had brought her out of the invisible world" (15). Abena's counsel centers around the steadily approach of John Indian, Tituba's future husband. Abena and Mama Yaya's spirits were able to see the discordant note that John would bring to Tituba's once carefree ways and happiness. They could see that she would become enslaved again because of her blindness to her husband's faults and gigolo tendencies, seeing only the good in him despite warnings from them.

Tituba in *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem* finds that it is her duty to carry on a tradition similar to those of her ancestors. She becomes a judge of character, an anchor for souls, a calming influence, and a helping hand to the people in her community. She is a midwife, leaning shoulder, and spiritual advisor. "I began to imagine another course for life, another meaning, another motive" (Condé 136). Her sense of duty is so strong that even in death she becomes a spirit and watches over the people of her island. She starts to shape the realities of her chosen people, one touch at a time.

While some ghosts look after their mortal descendants and genuinely want the best for them, there are others who seek to punish those of their blood. This is the case with the ghost in Toni Morrison's 1987 novel *Beloved*. The spirits of *I, Tituba* hold powers that are reminiscent of ancient gods and seek to improve the humans under their purview. They make them stronger, more able to survive against all odds that are stacked against them, as well as remind them that they are from a continent that is as old as civilization itself. The specter from Morrison's novel has different motivations; she seeks to have all attention placed on her, keeping her memory alive, greedy like a young child in her demands. There is the presence of the physical and the spiritual worlds intertwining at specific points regardless of linear narrative or locale. The story shifts focus to the past and present with the memories of the characters, yet it gives details into the last years of legal slavery in the United States. There is a sensation of fear in the heart and soul of the Ohio community's way of speaking about Sethe, her daughter Denver, and the events that happened eighteen years prior with the murder of her daughter. This daughter eventually becomes the ghost that haunts the house that they live in. Keith Cartwright posits that *Beloved* is true to the gothic historicist genre by

presenting history as a haunting and time as a labyrinth. His argument is that "Memories and transmissions of Africa meld with the torturous products of the enslavers' Africanist ideology" (Cartwright 224).

Sethe's involvement in her daughter's death, and the near deaths of her sons, is similar to what many Africans decided when making the treacherous journey across the Atlantic Ocean. They would rather take their own lives, and those of their children, than to live in forced bondage to a cruel people; some choked on their own tongues, others starved themselves, and even more tried—and succeeded—throwing themselves overboard from the ships carrying them, laden down with chains. According to the text, Sethe is one generation from her African born mother, and the only one of her siblings to survive to adulthood; one infant brother was deliberately starved to death because he looked too much like the men who owned and raped her mother. With a culture and history forcefully repeating itself in each successive generation, some lessons learned during cruel times are firmly entrenched in descendants, either as memory or unacknowledged habits. Rather than let her children be enslaved, Sethe would have them be dead so that they would be free forever.

Paul D's arrival at 124 and his ability to exorcise the spirit from the house, sets off a chain of events that leads to the mental and emotional deterioration of Sethe. Although expelled, the ghost emerges from the waters of a lake as a young woman who resembles both Denver and Sethe in an allusion to Yemoja, the Orisha who birthed all other Orishas and Goddess of Rivers and Oceans in Yoruba cosmology. An Orisha is a spirit, the perfect embodiment of aspects of human tendencies and connections to ancestral knowledge. Beloved's manifestation into a flesh and blood person, yet retention

of the abilities that she had as a spirit, are a clear warning sign to the occupants of the house. The more fixated she becomes on Sethe, the quicker her deterioration and the others in the house are pushed aside, particularly Denver, who had kept Beloved's secret, and Paul D. Beloved's ire with Paul D can be traced back to him daring to expel her from her mother's presence. Though a toddler at her death, this manifestation of Beloved appears to be a young adult woman, around the age of twenty; she still has very young, almost childlike, reactions to circumstances that most adults take for granted. Kari J. Winter believes that "In Beloved Toni Morrison eulogizes the millions of enslaved Africans who are "disremembered and unaccounted for," the "dearly beloved" whose stories have been irrecoverably lost" (83).

It is a shift from shade to solid physicality that causes an alteration and self-realization of what was lost with the baby's first death in the timeline. Wole Soyinka would argue that "…this attempt to manage the immensity of …spatial awareness makes every manifestation…a paradigm for the cosmic human condition" (41). Human beings, in the case of the characters in *Beloved*, are warned about clinging to lost hope, especially those who were enslaved. Their families could be ripped apart on a whim or they could be in bondage for the entirety of their lives. A spirit who can cross back into the physical realm and emerge transformed is anathema to the natural order in Gothic literature but it is also a trope that can be utilized in the African foundations of the genre.

Why could this be seen as important in a novel? Though this is a fictional account, it still reverberates with honest memory and emotion. Toni Morrison's phenomenon is called "rememory" and is described as the process of remembering all things that have been lost, especially people. "Beloved forces its central character, Sethe,

to repeat a haunting past with enough difference and intensity to become disposed of some of its most treacherous ghosts. The process of confrontation with unspeakable "rememory" or *nyama* enables Morrison's novel to move from gothic horrors to romance" (Cartwright 223). The use of rememory brings awareness and stability to a fleeting impression of what slavery and its aftermath entail.

Karla Holloway views *Beloved* as part of the Neo-Slave Narratives that have appeared since the mid-twentieth century. She speculates that this novel "takes up the era of the enslavement of Africans in the Americas and, in doing so, represent the genre's remarkable persistence" (Holloway 9). This forms a bond with the process of rememory as these Neo-Slave Narratives brings to mind the faces, names, and accounts of people whose stories could not be told. The duality of being present, yet remembering the past as if one is still a part of it is par the course of Africanized storytelling. Time stops having meaning within the text and horrors that were presented in literary form become as real as air brushing over skin or sunlight bearing down on the back of a bent neck. The reader knows that they are in a 21st-century world but also can clearly envision the daily struggles of the 18th and19th-century.

A consideration of African Gothic tales is that the spirit world is thought to have power in many forms: creation, destruction, love, hate, life as well as death. It is the place where dreams become reality, where gods watch over their creations, and where everything must eventually return. Africans, and those of African descent, are considered overly superstitious, but the question that should be deliberated is: what if it is not superstition, but an abject belief in a world that is flowing parallel with what is considered reality? There is a system of belief that is so deeply ingrained inside of

African peoples that even the far removal from their direct ancestors does not dull it, there is still the instinctual knowledge that something is more than what it appears to be on the surface. What is apparent to the naked eye is not always all that is reflected in reality; there is considerable more surrounding that one person, an object, or a situation than what is visible. Everything that is explainable becomes ritualized storytelling, or theatrical creation, to keep ancestral knowledge alive. "Ritual theatre, let it be recalled, establishes the spatial medium not merely as a physical area for simulated events but as a manageable contraction of the cosmic envelope within which man – no matter how deeply buried such a consciousness has latterly become – fearfully exists" (Soyinka 41). An argument can be made for the presence of this same ritual theater in other Gothic texts as well.

The Witching Hour by Anne Rice, published originally in 1990, is the first novel in the Lives of the Mayfair Witches trilogy. The tale follows the lives of the Mayfair family who reside in New Orleans, Louisiana. This book is multi-generational and divided into four parts that center heavily on events that impact Dr. Rowan Mayfair, the current heir of the family. A key member of New Orleans elitism, the Mayfair family is interspersed through the political, educational, medical, and religious institutions of the city. Rowan lives in San Francisco, California and grows up not knowing that she is the head of the various branches of her family as she was adopted by a cousin at birth. When her adopted mother, Ellie Mayfair Franklin, was dying of cancer, she extracted a promise from Rowan to never go back to New Orleans, to never contact any of the people there. There is a sense of urgency in this promise, as if Ellie was trying to keep her daughter safe. Rowan kept her promise for over a year until she was forced to break it. When she

finds out that her birth mother, Deirdre Mayfair, has passed away, the family secrets start to come to light and a terrifying history unfold, especially in regards to the family's ghost, Lasher. She sees whom she thinks is a possible burglar on the dock outside of her home before dawn on the same day—at the exact moment—that Deirdre dies. He appears to be a "tall, brown haired man, rather slender" (Rice 14). She notices that he looks at her pleadingly before disappearing before her eyes and becomes unnerved.

Rowan's life is further complicated when she saves Michael Curry from drowning at sea. A bond is formed instantaneously between the two that stretches over the entirety of the novel and culminates in their marriage. Michael is from an Irish family in New Orleans. He journeyed to San Francisco when he was a teenager to live with his aunt and uncle. He is a combination of the blue collar working man and sophisticated architect, not afraid of working with his hands but also designing some of the most beautiful structures in California. Michael, an unknown relation to the Mayfair family, saw the ghost when he was six years old and has developed the ability of psychometry, also called object reading, after nearly drowning. Unbeknownst to them, Michael is part of plan that extends back to the Mayfair's first encounter with Lasher and both are instrumental in fulfilling the wanton desires of the ghost. Aaron Lightner, a member of the organization of supernatural investigators called the Talamasca, states that the ghost and Rowan share a commonality. In his discussion with Michael he tells him that "creature has been attached to the Mayfair family for generations. It can kill people. But so can Dr. Rowan Mayfair" (Rice 252).

Each generation of the Mayfair family has a supernatural ability that can change weather patterns, manipulate time and space, heal, or kill. The first witch for the family

was Suzanne of the Mayfair, a simple girl who healed and was burned at the stake in Scotland. There is a heir that controls the fortunes of the family which was established in the 1670s by Deborah Mayfair, daughter of Suzanne and the local Scottish laird, when she sought to use Lasher to never be subjected to the will of any man. He allowed this until the next heir was born and of age to take up the mantel of his caretaker and willing servant. For thirteen generations, Lasher has grown in power and manipulated the Mayfair family into doing his bidding, even taking on the physical attributes of Julien Mayfair, the eighth witch of the family, to seduce multiple women to further the genetic mix of the Mayfairs. Julien is tied to Rowan as her great-great-great-great uncle and great-great-grandfather by the main line and is the great-great-great grandfather of Michael Curry through Sister Bridget Marie, his young mistress turned Catholic nun from the Irish Channel in New Orleans. Incest is featured heavily in *The Witching Hour*; generations of cousins marrying back into the main line of the Mayfairs, as well as acts perpetuated between siblings and parent to child can be seen as part of a chattel breeding program that Lasher subtly manipulated the family into forming. He made their abilities stronger while adding new blood from outsiders and re-establishing ties between the inside members for his own needs. He tells Rowan the truth as he stalks towards her:

> I made your soul. I chose the genes that went into you. I chose your parents, I chose your ancestors, I bred you Rowan. I knew where flesh and mind meet in you. I know your strength as no one else knows it. And you have always known what I wanted of you. You knew when you read the history (Rice 931).

Rowan's position as the thirteenth witch of the family is manifold. She is the heir of the family, a medical doctor who is used to logical ways of thinking and a healer; but, she is also responsible for causing the death of her adopted father and others through her psychokinetic abilities. She has powers of precognition and the gift of spellcasting. She

is a creature of magic and science, an *Übermensch*, a term coined by Friedrich Nietzsche to mean a transcended or superior human being. Her bloodlines include the Scottish, Spanish, Dutch, French, African, Irish, and Native American. She has abilities that allows for her to touch a non-corporeal being and draw them into a physical body, which is Lasher's ultimate objective—to be made flesh again; a goal which comes one Christmas Eve with the sacrifice of the unborn child that Rowan is carrying at the time. Rice describes the confrontation between Rowan and Lasher when she wrote:

> "The darkness furled again, it coiled in upon itself and it shot downward. It shot into her, raping her, splitting her apart. Like a giant fist it show upwards inside her womb, and her body convulsed as the pain caught her in a great lashing circle that she could see, shining bright, against her closed eyes" (932).

In that moment, Rowan experiences and knows what many African women were resolved to during the cruelty of slavery: having control over her body taken away, losing her child, being dehumanized as property—as chattel—for use of another's will. This trope is not an aberration of a fictional accounts based on the Slave Narrative but a standard occurrence and according to Wester, "Slave narratives, however, heavily hint at sexual transgression and sometimes speak of the rape of black women" (45).

There is a shared common thread that is integral to the stories being told in *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, *Beloved*, and *The Witching Hour*: ghosts who make changes in mortal lives. Maryse Condé, Toni Morrison, and Anne Rice built upon the foundations of African storytelling and culture to write out these new adaptations of the Slave Narrative. The novels take a hard look at America's disregard for Africans, their descendants, and how they kept their identity even in the face of oppression. In *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Saidiya V. Hartman writes that the "repression of slavery's unspeakable features and the shockingly

amnesic portrait of the peculiar institution produced national innocence yet enhanced the degradation of the past for those still hindered by its vestiges because they became the locus of blame and the site of aberrance" (133). America's ghosts are visible within the novels; the staunch racial prejudice and human indecency that were inflicted on the enslaved plays out for all to read.

It is the understanding, the very longing, of those whose ancestors were immersed in all things spiritual and physical to be expressed through their selected mediums of arts, of storytelling, and of song. People of the African diaspora hold beliefs from ancestral knowledge that will permeate every literary form. This is an intrinsic characteristic of African storytelling that is part heritage and part history. It is a permanent reminder of an often sundered part of the African identity: memory, spiritual and physical. The advent of the Atlantic Slave trade was despicable in that its effects are still being seen in the 21st-century. "Slavery's origin story has a shackle that shifts its shape, but not its grasp" (Holloway 9), and it becomes more than history, but self-awareness that gives a stronger meaning to the narratives being read.

The presence of a spiritual interloper plays heavily in the plots of all three novels, one who can make physical manifestations occur or who has intimate knowledge of the person that they are pursuing; yet, each author takes a differing road when discussing their fictional narrative. Condé, Morrison, and Rice draw from cultures that are African in influence, but are diverse in the development of their populaces. Maryse Condé is known for disputing the ideology of Pan-Africanists who have perpetuated the myth that all African Diasporic experiences are the same. Condé has expressed the opinion that none of the various Diasporas of African origin is a homogeneous group. She views it as a

racist and clichéd conception which was used by the colonials to classify enslaved Africans, despite their various origins. Condé steadfastly refutes the belief of monotonous similarity among the African Diaspora when she says that, "every Black society is different" (qtd. in Alexander 9).

While the principle of universal unity among all Africans was founded within a certain context, it has overlooked the repercussions of chattel slavery. The slave narrative genre has taken the turbulence that has been embodied during the Middle Passage, the processes of mental and physical colonization, and the devastating effects that forced bondage will have had on the human mind. Racial overtones that are many times ignored were founded with the history and circumstances of the Enslavement period. "The slave narrative represents a significant transition to the black novel; among its many influences in black fiction, this genre extended the discourse of the black author beyond the religiosity of the spiritual narrative" (West 65). The onus of the Slave Narrative becomes memorialization of all that has been lost, whether as a person or an identity.

The burden of proof affects the veracity of the novel in different ways. These three authors from very different locales have written narratives that are influenced heavily by the African. Maryse Condé is an author from the Caribbean, Toni Morrison is from Lorraine, Ohio, and Anne Rice a New Orleans native, three significant African inclined places, with histories that tell the honesty of American life during slavery, have shaped the style and creativity needed to write each novel. While some may argue against the influence of the African standing in these texts, Monica Coleman makes the argument that African Diasporic literature is African in nature because of the shared connections that Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Dr. Wole Soyinka make to Yoruba

religious practices that are still part of the African-American spiritual lexicon. "When Gates and Soyinka refer to traditional Yoruba religious elements within African Diasporic literature, they are most likely referring to Yoruba-based religions in their various syncretic forms in which they are known in the Americas" (Coleman 130). The African Diaspora that has developed in the Americas is African culture, nature, and spirituality that has was forcibly sundered in places—such as language—yet became fused tightly in others by the remembered use of storytelling to keep that heritage alive. That heritage transformed through the years but persistently shaped the American Gothic novel by addressing racialized concepts, hidden spiritual beliefs and the toxic culture of European-American male masculinity in the subjection of women.

In the ever-changing language of textbooks, modern American influencers have tried to downplay the evidence as anecdotal of the cruel vagaries of slavery, racism, and sexual abuse; the Slave Narrative does not, it is truth unvarnished. It presents in general language and emotional undertones the horrific debasement endured through the entirety of the Enslavement period. Slave owners, and their accomplices, were the worst sort of humanity. Systems of classification based on skin tones, language, and familial closeness to the enslaver were used as an arbitrary means of tearing apart the fledgling communities that the Africans established. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall points out that even the ethnical classification of *creole* was used to differentiate the generations of the enslaved. "In eighteenth-century Louisiana, the term creole referred to locally born people of at least partial African descent, slave and free, and was used to distinguish American-born slaves from African-born slaves when they were listed on slave inventories" (157). That term rendered the Americanized Africans as more valuable than their African forbearers

because it was assumed that they had acclimated to the servile condition that they were placed in; a situation that was in no way true. Diasporic Africans learned to hide their culture within the new European-American society, teaching their ways to each successive generation regardless of ethnicity until it became part of the major cultural representation.

Caryn Cossé Bell notes that the Creole populations of Louisiana were capable of "Ignoring class differences and even racial barriers, they joined with other Catholic activists to alleviate some of the consequences of the American slave regime" (136). Catherine Savage Brosman further suggests that the mixed-ethnicity Creole writers of the Americas were not simple propagandists but that they used these types of "thesis fiction directed toward overturning institutions or cultural uses and codes" (69). These writers reimagined abject change in the social conditions of the Americas that had been fashioned on European utopias, especially towards those who were not European. Both Bell and Brosman believe that within Slave Narratives, there is a sentiment of forcible remembrance that has implicational basis for the African American novel, and thus for the American Gothic novel.

Further proof of the hereditary nature of the enslaved Africans can be found in the names that they chose—Senegal, Malian, etc. — and their remembered history. The Afro-Louisianans of the 18th-Century were the product of two distinctive groups, the Bambara of Mali and the Wolofs of Senegambia. Sublette suggests that the cultural nuances of both groups came to lay the foundation of Afro-Creole life in the territory, especially around New Orleans. It is stated that "many Afro-Louisianans had Bambara fathers and Wolof mothers. This collection of Africans in Louisiana was clearly a

community, despite its enslaved status" (Sublette 59). The Senegambians were artisans, goldsmiths, silversmiths, ironworkers and farmers; they knew how to process indigo into dyes which became a commercial export for Louisiana. The Bambara were warriors, medicine men, spiritual leaders, musicians and brought the tradition of *jali*, or bards, to the territory. When both groups merged, their distinctive traits forged into a strong Afro-Creole community that has permeated Louisiana's culture to the present.

How does this connect to the other communities? Coleman likes to specify that "African American literary theory argues that African Diasporic literatures distinctly portray tradition African religious imagery in the plot development" (129), religious narratives like the belief in the afterlife or spirits to be called on in times of need. European gothic tropes have ghosts and spirits clinging to the living as a form of punishment, or a psychological break from reality. This is not the case for the African elements in the American Gothic. John Mbiti goes on further to acknowledge that for some Africans there is the belief that death is not the end of human life. "A person continues to exist in the hereafter. This continuation of life beyond death is recognized through a very widespread practice of remembering the departed, which is found throughout Africa" (Mbiti qtd. in Patton 119-20). That belief system is part of the African Diaspora's way of telling a story, or remembering the past.

Birago Diop's poem *Les Soufflés* discusses the 21st-century African's perspective on the dead. In the second stanza, the wording describes spirits as people, not gone or forsaken to a void of nothingness:

> Those who are dead are not ever gone;
> They are in the darkness that grows lighter
> And in the darkness that grows darker.
> The dead are not down in the earth;

> They are in the trembling of the trees
> In the groaning of the woods,
> In the water that runs,
> In the water that sleeps,
> They are in the hut, they are in the crowd:
> The dead are not dead.

This sentimentality is closely aligned with the African Diaspora's way of holding conversations with to those who have gone beyond physical bodies. Speaking in prayers, remembering words of wisdom, or the feeling of having a long lost loved one walking besides them as they go through their day are all cultural links back to continental Africa that have not been severed through the atrocity of American chattel slavery. African literary history is fundamentally gothic, to be about more than surface thoughts or values and the texts in question clarify their veracity in the canon. "Ancestral beliefs, in summary, underscore certain social ideals: the vibrant reality of the spiritual world or "an alive universe," the continuity of life and human relationship beyond death, the unbroken bond of obligations and the seamless web of community" (55 Kalu).

In Katherine Weese's view, the fantastical elements presented in African Diasporic gothic texts form a chronological framework that is biographical and which challenges the assumption made by readers on what constitutes the historical novel. Referencing Toni Morrison, Weese notes how the author "not only subverts gothic conventions in a racialized context to call attention to the fantastic, gothic horror inherent in slavery itself but also subverts those conventions in a gendered context to advance her feminist treatment of the experience of the enslaved mother in particular and to challenge white social constructions of black masculinity" (Weese 140). Without a ghost to challenge the forgetfulness instilled during slavery, the past would not be remembered nor appreciated. The people who are descendants of the survivors would have lost their

histories, as many have, or been forced to assimilate faster to a false sense of nationalism that was never designed for them.

The Gothic is speculated to be about the unseen, the world-weary, and the unheard. Slave narratives, and their fictional counterparts, are gothic in extremis. "The very life of a slave is also inevitably a gothic existence. The murders/suicides, rapes, entrapment and escape cycles, torture (brutal whippings), and familial secrets (illegitimate births) that make up numerous gothic plots constitute real, daily existence under slavery" (Wester 35).

Dr. Teresa Washington allows that the violent institution of slavery strove to wring the joy out of life for the African person. For the enslaved, it was difficult to find a reason to smile, hug a loved one, or startle the birds with one's laughter. The slave narrative, subsequent novels, and memory not only show the brutality but how the "rich artistic traditions for which Africa is lauded became twisted forms of mockery in America" (Washington 219). Minstrel shows mocked African dances and language, American plays took African stories and cast the characters in a dark light full of stereotypes that are still in play on cinematic screens. Negative portrayals of the African individual in America is seen as normal when it is only a fragmented fraction of real life and the affected person is told to forget the past. While "Americans, legendarily, free themselves by shunning the past" (Redding 43), the slave narrative as a genre does not allow for this; it makes the past as relevant as the present narrative. The slave narrative teaches about history, a permanent reminder of who the enslaved were and why their memories are just as important in the national canon.

In a recorded conversation between Toni Morrison and Robert Richardson, Carol E. Henderson shares the importance of rememory. Morrison told Richardson that:

> There is no place you or I can go, to think about or not think about, to summon the presences of, or recollect the absences of slaves; nothing that reminds us of the ones who made the journey and of those who did not make it. There is no suitable memorial or plaque or wreath or wall or park or skyscraper lobby. There is no 300 foot tower. There's no small bench by the road. There is not even a tree scored, an initial that I can visit or you can visit in Charleston or Savannah or New York or Providence or, better still, on the banks of the Mississippi. And because such a place does not exist (that I know of), the book had to (qtd. in Henderson 84).

A sad but honest testament to the strength and survival of the African Diaspora can be felt in those words. The Slave Narrative as gothic text is fundamental as a historical record and lesson in the value of humanity. The novels *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, *Beloved*, and *The Witching Hour* stand as historical and gothic within an African scope.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

It can be argued that with each successive text written, what became considered the basis for the modern American Gothic genre approaches issues and ethics of the Georgian period combined with African wisdom and spirituality. This continuous application of rational thinking to 20th and 21st-century works of the same vein opens up an exploration of human diversity, fears, and spiritual beliefs as well as synchronic behaviors and connections to African concepts. It is with the use of supernatural or preternatural elements to categorize situations that occur within the context of the story that an author may appeal to fixed temperaments, social conformities, and internalized fears that their readers may experience throughout the reading of the text. Wole Soyinka calls this phenomenon 'visceral questioning.' He states that "The fundamental visceral questioning intrudes, prompted by the patient, immovable and eternal immensity" (Soyinka 2) to acknowledge Africans as spiritual beings with an understanding of the intricacies of human nature through the use of questioning. These questions surrounding race, sexuality, and spiritual beliefs demand responses of those being inundated with foreign information, or colonial mindsets on a constant basis. The African diaspora answers with a specific context in fiction and Gothicism based on knowledge that has been passed through generations orally. Some of this knowledge has become tempered through disparities in literacy rates or failing memories but is in no way less valid.

Abjection of the human condition, specifically those of African descent within the American continents and Caribbean, Julia Kristeva posits that "The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which is irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death: it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance" (3). The outer appearance of death is symbolic of the mental, physical, and spiritual retardation that enslaved Africans were forced to endure for survival. Though many have lost their overt and obvious connection to their ancestors, familial habits and traditions hold a distinctive African flair. It is in this way, that the African descended person can find social and historical context in the Gothic novel. Through the horrors endured by ancestors, a mental enslavement still permeates the culture in the 21st-century, and with it the stigma of being considered "black" in the Americas.

Ideas of salvation through a spiritual medium are discussed within the African American Gothic novel. Conceptually, this would allow for a hybridization of African and European spiritual beliefs to amalgamate into a new religion, i.e. Voodun, Obeah, and Santeria. This also addresses how feminist and womanist literary theory can find inherent historical value through said texts. Monica Coleman's belief that "Even within the womanist concepts of salvation examined here, slave narratives, nineteenth-century autobiographical narratives, *Beloved*…have served as repositories for accessing the experiences of past and contemporary black women." (126). It can be ascertained that ancestral knowledge in Gothic works aim to identify the wide scope of tragedies and horrors that were part of the daily life of the enslaved, while preserving the cultural ways of the African continent.

Women's sexuality is viewed in Gothic literature as being of two extremes, and the "dominant ideology has cast Woman into two inhuman roles: Eve, the mother of sin and sexuality, and Madonna, the Virgin Mother of God. The enslavement of Africans made it profitable for white men to divide their conflicting notions of Women into stereotypes of good white angels and evil black beasts" (Winter 57). Women can never just *be* in most literary texts; they have to fall into the stigmatized characterizations that the European male set forth during the Enlightenment period and have infected Western society with a rape culture that delegitimizes the narratives that women bring forth, particularly if they are not part of the dominate culture.

The wide variance in African Diaspora literary genres can be explained away with the influence of writers such as Octavia Butler and Toni Morrison. Both authors are contemporary, yet have differing styles of approaching the African American novel. Jerome Gregory Hampton posits that "As for contemporary African American fiction, Butler's influences are evident. Although writers like Toni Morrison and Alice Walker have not yet been classified as SF, their location of race and gender at the forefront of very successful novels enabled Butler to sell her work to publishers in a different genre" (116).

Maisha Wester's view that African American writers can pen novels in more than one literary genre is expressed through the ever expanding fields in which they are being published. She stated that the "conversation led me to the startling discovery that there are far more African American writers of gothic fiction than critics typically recognize, and these writers make interventions into the genre" (Wester 1). Writers of color, and women writers of color, are seeking to expand their repertoire into more than the

religious novel or slave narrative. Newer authors have infiltrated what has been deemed a "white male's playground" in the genres of Science Fiction, Fantasy, Erotica, and Horror. These genres are as closely linked to the Gothic narrative as *Frankenstein* or *Dracula*.

African writers of color have learned the subversive lesson that Malidoma Patrice Some wrote about in his 1994 personal biography, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic, and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman*. "To fight the system effectively you have to be on the inside" (Some 129). Africana narratives will never be told effectively without Africana writers employing their knowledge, skills, and historical references to the genres in question. Representation of the African Diaspora can only accurately be made through the expanded ties with Africana writers. The novels being compared in this thesis show the importance of African culture in literary writing for future generations.

Where Gothic literature has been known to inspire readers to transcend the bonds of race, culture, gender, and language in their pursuit of understanding the concepts and stories being told, it has also been capable of transmitting ideas of ancient African origin. The ability to recognize the power in sacrifice, spirituality and physicality is what makes Gothic literature have such a synchronic relationship with African concepts. The individual is asked to explore his or her expression of fears, and how this can be shared through the community. It is believed that gothic literature's symbiosis with the more ancient African concepts of ancestral knowledge, spirituality, and belief affects how fate, free will and destiny in the characters mentioned in text shape our understanding of the world around human beings.

The implication that writers of color can narrate Gothic tales and texts as effectively, if not more honestly, than their European descended counterparts is evident in the small fragment of novels being presented in this thesis. Soyinka also postulates states that a "Man can shelve and even overwhelm metaphysical uncertainties by epic feats, and prolong such a state of social euphoria by their constant recital, but this exercise in itself proves a mere surrogate to the bewildering phenomenon of the cosmic location of his being" (2). Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla*, Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba: Black Witch of Salem*, or Octavia Butler's *Fledgling* can be a link to the history and ancestry of Africans and the lessons on spirituality, belief, fate, free will and destiny that have come before. Humans seek, question, learn, divulge, and try to find a union between their physical shell and their spiritual well-being. This is fundamental on a visceral level and helps us to improve ourselves through the transience of the gothic tale.

Further study into the realm of American and African Gothic literature could be presented towards researchers of the genre as a historical text within a contextual framework, specifically that of a historical text. The African Gothic is seen in American literature as part and parcel of the literary canon of the Americas; without it there would be no American canon, because without the African presence in the narrative there would be no historical relevancy for the slave narratives, for the African American novel, or for the spirituals that are sung in churches and are the basis of Blues music that is presented in this country as an All-American pastime. Future studies should concentrate within the framing of the locale, spiritual connection, and history of the Africans that were enslaved in the American colonies. It should also be noted that African Diasporic people pass

down literary motifs through song as well as story for their children, and these concepts are permeated in everyday life of the African descended person.

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